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Mercredi 1er mars 2017

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Todd Decker

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 1 March 2017

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 1er mars 2017

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPORTING CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 SUR LE SOUTIEN À L'ENFANCE, À LA JEUNESSE ET À LA FAMILLE

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 22, 2017, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 89, An Act to enact the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, to amend and repeal the Child and Family Services Act and to make related amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 89, Loi édictant la Loi de 2017 sur les services à l'enfance, à la jeunesse et à la famille, modifiant et abrogeant la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille et apportant des modifications connexes à d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'll be sharing my time with my colleague the member for Dufferin–Caledon, who has been a fantastic advocate for children and youth. I know she's going to continue to be dedicated and involved, even though she recently passed the torch to me. I'm the newly minted critic for children, youth and families for the PC caucus.

It has been over 30 years since this piece of legislation was overhauled. Of course, we're speaking today on Bill 89, Supporting Children, Youth and Families Act, for anybody who just turned on the channel at home.

It's really time for an update; I think we all agree. While we might differ on some small parts or wonder how best to implement or fund the system, we're all in agreement that we want the province of Ontario to promote the protection, best interests and well-being of all our children.

For years, many organizations and stakeholders have pointed to ongoing issues with the child welfare system. The Auditor General has laid out problems with the ministry's accountability in three separate audits, in 2003, 2008 and 2016. For too long, there have been serious deficiencies in the system which have let our most vulnerable slip through the cracks—and in some cases, even death.

I'm going to mention two, because I really think that their lives were not in vain, even though they were cut so short.

Katelynn Sampson was murdered by two caregivers in their Parkdale apartment on August 3, 2008. When paramedics found her lifeless body, it was covered in 70 gruesome wounds. An autopsy showed she had died of septic shock stemming from her injuries. I think that her name is a name that all of us will carry for the rest of our lives. I think that in her memory, this new bill was drafted.

As well, we remember Jeffrey Baldwin, whose death, also from septic shock, after years of mistreatment by his grandparents, led to significant changes in policy by children's aid societies in the granting of custody to relatives.

Many advocates for children's rights believe that our services need to be more child-centred by focusing on the rights and wishes of the child. I think that it's difficult. It's difficult sometimes, Mr. Speaker, to engage with a child who has been traumatized. But I think that we can, and we should, do more to speak to the children themselves, and not just to find out their wishes: I don't think that you get a clear picture of the situation a child is in without even trying to talk to the child.

Children should be encouraged to express their views freely and safely, and their views should be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. Children should be consulted on the nature of services they are receiving, and advised on decisions made and informed of these rights.

The bill also attempts to focus on the importance of a child's or youth's identity—for example, culture, race, sexual orientation, gender expression, etc.—in how and what services are provided. Many community organizations are raising concerns about what this entails exactly. I am concerned myself that this Liberal government hasn't done enough to address those communities' concerns. I would like to see a lot of consultation. I'm hoping to see people make it down to committee, and they can email as well. They don't have to make it down here in person. People can even phone in. I'm hoping that before we go to committee, we meet with our community members in our ridings and get their viewpoints.

We all know that this new legislation is attempting to better match our Human Rights Code. We hear oftentimes about human rights. It's important that our child protection workers are encouraged to have conversations with the children so that they're better able to successfully place them in our communities.

Youth themselves who were in care were engaged in developing this piece of legislation to better focus on the

rights of the child. Child protection workers should have conversations. I think that it's very important to have those tough conversations, when it's age-appropriate, in the right circumstances, with the children about their feelings, their background and their interests.

I want to mention that there's a big problem in our province with mental health wait-lists. It wasn't something when I was a child that you heard so much talk about, the mental health of children and youth, but I think we're understanding now that we need to intervene at much younger ages and deal with things, that it's not just the phase that a child is going through. We need more pediatric psychiatrists, and we need more beds in units for children and adolescents who are in mental health crisis.

We hear that there is some change in the language in the bill. "Crown ward" is being changed to "child in extended society care." They are removing the term "runaway." The term "abandoned" is being replaced with "parent not available." Words are just words sometimes, but they can be powerful in changing the whole dynamic of what we're referring to. We're not referring to a child as wanted or not wanted. I'm reminded of the series The Paradise that I think is on Netflix now, where they refer to "foundlings" and "wanted" children versus "not wanted" children. It's just horrific when you realize the language that was used not that many decades ago in terms of children in our communities who don't have proper homes.

Lauren Israel is not the only family law lawyer in Ontario who is worried that there's not enough money available to address the long waiting list for services for child and youth counselling. She specifically mentioned the lack of psychiatric beds. She would like to see more parenting courses that are culturally and language appropriate, especially for parents in custody or on bail. And there are still a lot of families, she reminded us, who lack proper housing.

There's a lack of specialized lawyers in legal aid and a lack of Family Court rooms. After all, if you can't get a courtroom, timelines are useless. I want to say that again, Mr. Speaker: If there are long waiting lists and you can't get a courtroom, we can pass whatever legislation we want. We can say that a child has to see a pediatric psychiatrist within a month if they're exhibiting signs of mental health distress, but if there are no spots available, are we really doing what's in the best interests of the child?

We always talk about the weak link in any chain—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Continue.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that after three years of talking in the Legislature, I don't notice it anymore. It's amazing. We should all be respectful when there are new members in the House and remind ourselves that it's tough when you first get here, those first few months, to be able to talk over—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'd rather you heckle me.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Well, heckling for sure—that's tough—but background conversations as well. I guess we all learn to go into a zone.

Again, Lauren Israel, the family law lawyer I was talking to, wanted us to know that she finds our courts are very sensitive to kids. I asked her if she had any concerns. She said that, really, she finds that the judges speak to the children a lot, that they are very sensitive and consider things such as the child's age and maturity and the level of understanding, and are also very cognizant of the risks in children's young lives, what the potential risk is based on their decisions.

0910

She also feels that our social workers are extremely conscientious and really do visit the kids appropriately. She checks up on it in the files, and she feels quite confident that, for the most part—obviously, we all know the social workers have families as well, and medical concerns. There could be times when there's a bit of a struggle in a specific agency, but she feels that the agencies, certainly that she is working with, are doing a great job.

There's part of the bill that focuses a little bit on extra-provincial child protection orders. This is an inter-provincial project, sometimes, with children. They could have one parent in one province, a parent in another province, or parents have moved and the teenager is acting out because they don't want to move. We have to be able to coordinate with the other province. I would ask, again, that the people who are drafting the legislation and looking at amendments consider what's going on in other jurisdictions so that we're more in line, so that we're not having kids on long waiting lists or problems in understanding. Even language has to be well thought out and in line with other provinces.

My next topic is youth justice. There are reasons why youth are not incarcerated with adults, and I think that we all agree with that. Whenever, though, we make legislation there always seems to be unintended consequences. I would ask that we go through every piece of this legislation and we take the time to think of possible unintended consequences.

We wouldn't want to see, say, a gang where—I think that it's been discussed in the past in our media that a gang will recruit somebody under the age of 18 to have them do whatever serious crime they're looking at participating in because they know that that youth will not be charged the same way that they will if they are 18. I think our courts have smartened up to that and take that into consideration, and we do see, sometimes, children under the age of 18 being treated more like adults. I think, again, it talks to our justice system and the judges' and lawyers' understanding of the ins and outs of what's going on.

Society expects us all to help the youth develop the skills they need to reach their potential. We don't want to incarcerate youth and just have them get out and go back and look for whatever gang they were involved in, or

whatever activity they were involved in that put them in there in the first place. We don't want to have that revolving door in our youth centres. We have to make every effort to ensure that they're getting the support—emotional support is very important, as well as some kind of training. I would hope that, in our youth centres—I have never been to any of them, and I have that on my list of things in my new portfolio I would like to do and have a much better understanding of.

But the flip side, if you're working with difficult youth, is that we have to keep our employees safe. I think that I would like to take a second to offer condolences to the family members of a youth and a worker who died just this past week in Kawartha Lakes, in a fire that seems to have been deliberately set by one of the youth in the group home. These tragedies can happen with kids who aren't in care. They have a fight with parents, or things can go from bad to worse in a family home. But we certainly have to provide the protection for the workers in the home. I'm sure that there's going to be a lot of investigation and, hopefully, maybe from that investigation there may be even amendments put forward for this piece of legislation based on the tragedy that just occurred last week.

When children are being incarcerated or acting out, they often have to use some kind of mechanical restraints to protect not just the workers, but the youth—I don't want to call them children—themselves. It should never be used as a means of punishment. It should really be used, we understand, for protection—and we all agree; I'm certain about that. There are, outlined in this piece of legislation, the exact circumstances when mechanical restraint equipment can be used. It might change depending on the settings and the circumstances, and we all understand that. We can't put ages, because we all understand that you can have a 12-year-old who is stronger and bigger than the workers there, while a 16-year-old might not be.

They are seeking to replace the words "secure isolation" with "secure de-escalation." We've been talking a lot in the Legislature about people being isolated for very long times—months, and even years—in our adult detention centres—jails. But we certainly wouldn't want to be isolating youth. The whole point is to rehabilitate. How can you possibly do that if they're locked in a room by themselves?

Another family lawyer that I spoke to is Colin Tobias. His wife is also a lawyer. They wanted to express that they're very happy to see that we're expanding the age of protection to include up to the age of 18. But they want to remind the Legislature that kids vote with their feet. We can implement whatever rules we want, but especially with youth, we really have to have them agree to whatever the plan is and to sit down and to have that plan, and not just tell them, "Today we're doing this, and tomorrow you're going there, and the next day we're doing this."

I know, from my own experience with my teenagers, that nobody likes surprises. We don't like surprises. We're not that happy when we show up to debate one bill, and we're being told by the government, "No, we've put that aside. We're going to be debating another bill today." You feel a little bit flustered. You feel a little bit anxious if you're not prepared. But it's more than that, Mr. Speaker: You feel disrespected sometimes. It's very important with youth, with teenagers, to ensure that they feel part of that dialogue and part of that discussion, and that they don't feel disrespected.

I think that a lot of times, we forget our children are growing up. It's tough for a parent who is used to—I see the pages are all agreeing with me. It's tough for the parents to realize that their young child is now moving into adulthood and has opinions and interests of their own.

Colin Tobias, the lawyer, told me of a recent case of a kid who turned 16 on a Saturday, and they couldn't convince him to go into care. They wanted him to go into care before he turned 16, because they knew that then they wouldn't be able to get him into care. They were able to have that discussion and convince him to go into care for one day on the Friday—just for one day. They said, "You can get to leave on the Saturday, so it's just for one day, to go into foster care so that it will be an option for you for the next two years, and if you do decide you want to go into care, that option would be available." They did convince him to do that, and he went into care for the one day. I guess now he's on the roster.

I think that's why we're seeing the consequences of those situations, and the frustration of social workers. It's not just about children turning 16 and needing to go into care. They may have needed to go into care when they were 15, and refused. Now, when they're 16 and a half, they decide they do want to go into care, and they can't, because they hadn't been placed before.

What we hear over and over again, from speaking to people who work with youth in the communities, is that education is the way out. I think that's the answer for every community. That's the challenge. As people who have experienced life, we understand that education is vital to reaching your full potential, but it's very hard sometimes to convince teenagers of that.

The suggestion was made to me that they would like to see the high school credit system more of a province-wide high school credit system and more of a seamless system—I marked this down; it's my words—sort of virtual schooling, with some kind of virtual school board. We see sometimes, for home schooling, that there is sort of a province-wide supervision of children who are home-schooled. So why can't we do that for children who are struggling or in care, so that they're not necessarily having to switch school boards if they're being moved around a lot or if it's a very complicated situation? Maybe there could be more of a province-wide school board that can supervise their education and move them more seamlessly so that if they do half a year at one school board and half a year at the other school board, they're not losing that course credit, because they completed the course, except they did it at two different school boards. It's not so easy. Sometimes it can be

transferrable. It's not so easy to transfer it. It's a lot of work, I imagine, for our caseworkers. When we need them out there doing other work, we have them dealing with the school boards.

I'm just throwing that out as something that we can have a discussion about at a later date.

0920

I spoke to a lawyer who works with children—a third lawyer—who mentioned that large foster homes are often in Peel and Durham and that kids are moved between boards suddenly. The specific problem is the special-needs services—that's the big challenge, the special-needs services and our kids. She said that there are long waits for specialized service classrooms, and that about 80% of kids are involved in the court system and about two thirds of those have educational gaps and need specialized classes.

The crisis, she feels, is the elderly cohort of foster parents who are retiring, and she'd like to see more wiggle room for who can foster a child. I don't know exactly what her experiences are, but my understanding is that some foster parents feel unable to have more than one child in their home and they're pressured into taking more children than they want to handle. Oftentimes, parents have sort of complicated schedules that they need to support; and perhaps there are two homes that want to help out for half a year and half a year. I'm not saying that's ideal, but I think that if we have such long waits for foster parenting, we really need to do more to get in those communities and ask people what it would take for them to be a foster parent.

A lot of times, people have misconceptions about what's involved. They think they can never go on vacation. And what happens if they get sick suddenly? Are they stuck? They don't understand that there is a process to have the children moved temporarily if there are one or two vacations a year—obviously, not somebody who travels a lot.

I just wanted to talk about the Child Protection Information Network, CPIN, which is being implemented—in some agencies, it's already fully implemented. It has been a big challenge. We've heard a lot of discussion in the Legislature about other software—SAMS—and it doesn't seem that we're necessarily ensuring that the bugs are worked out. I don't know who exactly makes the decisions about information technology in the Legislature, but we certainly saw from eHealth that taxpayers' money was not spent wisely in terms of computers and software, and we didn't really accomplish anything with the billion dollars in eHealth.

I'm sure that with CPIN we're making progress, but it seems like there are a lot of flags that have gone up from the agencies. They have to go to the centralized ministry, and they understand why: because they want the problems to be fixed so that in the other agencies the problems are fixed as well. If one agency fixes their IT problems, the other agencies might not know about it if it's not going to a centralized place. On the other hand, if it's going to a centralized place, there are complications.

We know CPIN is trying to streamline all the agencies across the province so that there's better tracking of the children and who is taking care of the children. I think that if we have a better system in place, it would be of huge benefit to the challenges we have in our community with human trafficking of youth in the sex industry. So we have to do everything we can to ensure that the process goes faster and more effectively.

We are hearing a lot of concerns about CAS amalgamations. In this new piece of legislation, we give a lot of power to the ministry and the minister in terms of forcing some amalgamations and what that would mean in our communities. Again, I would like decisions to be made. Obviously, there are efficiencies and monetary concerns. Specifically, now that we're increasing the age of care to 18, there are a lot of monetary concerns. I think that, again, we have to be making these decisions in the best interests of the children, the youth, the care workers and the foster parents. Everybody really needs to be considered when we're making these types of decisions. We certainly don't want to fix one problem and see that we've created way more.

I want to mention access centres for children. I didn't specifically see anything addressed in the Legislation about access centres, but I understand that they really don't have much space available evenings and weekends. For people who aren't aware, these are centres where parents can go and have visits with their children, if they have visitation rights, but they have to be supervised. They have to have an appointment; they don't just drop in. Obviously, their child has to be brought there. Obviously it's challenging for a foster home to have to bring the child on an evening or weekend, but the child is in school during the week. The parents have work, possibly, during the week. I would like to see more of a community discussion on maybe creative solutions to access centres.

We have an eye centre up north where they go with a clinic. It's mobile. They have a mobile eye clinic going to northern communities. We hear of mobile libraries that used to go around to communities before they had Internet and e-books. I'm wondering if maybe that's one solution that I'm going to throw out there, that maybe we need mobile access centres that could move around and provide supervision in different locations and be more accessible. That's why it's called "access centres"; it's supposed to be accessible.

I just want to mention the Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy, which is a big part of the discussion of this legislation. We're repealing the terms "Indian" and "native" and replacing them with "First Nations, Inuk or Métis." They want to improve the reporting about services provided to our indigenous people. We have a very unique relationship here in Ontario, and I think that there's talk of having more agencies and more training in the indigenous communities themselves to manage their child welfare concerns. We have to consider all the impacts on those communities, those children and those families.

Jordan's Principle is about Jordan River Anderson, who was an indigenous child who died in a hospital, born with multiple medical problems. The reason he had to die in hospital and not go home and receive home care—he did have a home to go to—is because apparently the governments in 2005 were arguing over who should pay for his at-home care. That's a tragedy, and that has been a focus of this piece of legislation as well as others: How do we ensure that we streamline things and have things more efficient and do what's in the best interests of the child and not necessarily fight between different ministries and different agencies in exactly the same province?

I want to summarize a bit by saying that the PC caucus and I intend to support Bill 89, but we're looking forward to proposing some amendments in the committee and hearing all of the input from the communities. Bill 89 will, of course, increase that age of protection to include 16- and 17-year-olds.

We're hoping we will see some good data collection and better accountability and effectiveness of service, and revise the rules around adoption and licensing of children's residences. We feel confident that Bill 89 will not prevent any parent from adopting or maintaining custody of a child so long as those parents provide or can provide the care, support and safety that the child deserves.

This bill comes after many organizations and stakeholders have shown that the current system is failing many of Ontario's children. It also marks the potential to replace the 32-year-old piece of legislation and ongoing problems that still mean that children often slip through the cracks.

To be fair, we don't hear about all the good stories, and there are tens of thousands of them. There are fantastic foster parents. The care workers, as I've said, are working very hard. Unfortunately, those don't make it into the newspaper headlines.

We want to see more clarification about when the ministry can remove children's aid society board members, appoint supervisors to take over societies and even force amalgamations of societies. We all know that a clear process will give both the agencies and the families some clarity on how they can expect to follow through. If you have a concern with a child protection agency, what are the exact steps that you should be taking before the ministry would take over?

We're particularly supportive of increasing the age. We think that aging care to 18 would go a long way to fighting human trafficking. We have to ask: Where is the money going to come from? We understand that children—this is what I was told by the ministry staff—won't be forced into care to the extent that they are before 16. They'll be given the option not to go into care but still have monetary support by the province. I think when they told me that, they were kind of hoping that not that many children who are 16 and 17 will want to go into care.

0930

I would suggest that I think a lot of children will want to go into care if they hear that's the standard. Children and youth tend to often do what their peers are doing. If they hear that most 17-year-olds who don't have a home are going into the care system, then they will be more willing to go into the care system. So it might take a while until we get the numbers up.

I want to mention my colleague the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, who worked so tirelessly to prevent our vulnerable youth from becoming victims in the skyrocketing trade of humans for sex. It really is a modern-day form of slavery.

My PC caucus colleagues and I will do our best to ensure that this legislation protects children and ensures they are provided with the services they deserve.

I just want to mention a couple of things. I was taught by my late mother that there are no bad kids. We won't say there are no parents who aren't adequate for taking care of children, but a lot of times it's just a bad match, and it's just not the right child for the right parent.

I spent a lot of time, and I still do, with many teenagers in my community because they want to volunteer for community service hours or they are interested in politics. Their parents are always like, "You spend days with my child. How can you stand them? They're so sarcastic; they're so rude; they're so grumpy." I just always feel that maybe we need to have a program in place where we trade each other's teenagers, because I find everybody's teenagers wonderful. Mine can be grumpy sometimes.

It is an interesting scenario sometimes—and to do better education, I would point out, of our own children in the school system: not just parenting classes or home economics classes or things like that, but to really have those discussions with kids about anger management, that there may be a time in your life where you experience anger, where you're literally seeing red, and to count to 10 and to learn how to deal with that.

I'm going to pass the rest of my time to my colleague the member from Dufferin–Caledon. I look forward to hearing what she has to say.

I would remind everybody that it takes a village to raise a child.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Dufferin–Caledon.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Thank you to the member from Thornhill. For someone who has just taken over the file in, I think, the last two weeks, clearly she has a very good handle on what needs to be updated and some of the issues that the minister and the government are facing.

There are a few things. The advantage of being the second lead is that we've already heard from the minister and the parliamentary assistant on this issue. There was one frankly disturbing comment made by the parliamentary assistant that I would love, in the two-minute response, for her to clarify and expand upon.

From Hansard on February 22, the comment was made: "We hope that through consultation with societies and communities, there will be voluntary restructuring to improve services to children, youth and their families."

If the goal is to improve the child protection system in Ontario, then I believe that sentence needs a lot more

meat on the bone. Please explain to me how making child protection agencies larger, how amalgamating them so that individual communities no longer have what we'll volunteer CAS boards participating—when we take that away, how does that make child protection agencies and child protection in the province of Ontario better? It really struck me when she said that in her opening remarks, and I would love to have some clarification.

Frankly, I think this bill is about the larger issue. We have, in the province of Ontario, ministerial directives; I call them "thou shalts." "Thou shalt do the following." The Minister of Children and Youth Services will issue a directive. It will go to every—in most cases, they're called children's aid societies, but for the interest of consistency, call them child protection agencies. It says, "Thou shalt"—I'll use an example—"contact a family or open a file within 12 hours of receiving a phone call on a child of concern." "Thou shalt."

We also have a "thou shalt" in the province of Ontario that no child protection agency can pass a budget that is going to be in a deficit. I'm not sure about this government, but it's pretty challenging to figure out how many child protection calls you're going to get in any fiscal year.

We put all of these very stringent limitations on child protection agencies, and yet we also don't acknowledge that it is a system that is fraught with issues.

Now, to suggest that the issue is "we must amalgamate," to me, is such a false argument. For her to open that door with her opening remarks is very concerning to me. All it did was raise a whole bunch more of issues and concerns with child protection agencies—volunteer boards—who are sitting there, trying to do the best job that they can do with all of the directives and the "thou shalts" that already exist.

Back to Bill 89: Let's talk about CPIN for a minute. CPIN, of course, came about as a result of one of the many, unfortunately, coroners' reports and inquests into children who have passed away in the province of Ontario—unnecessarily, I would add.

CPIN's goal, CPIN's idea, is that every child, every individual, every person who has any kind of interaction with a child protection agency will be entered. The goal is that another agency who is also looking at that child—because to my colleague's point, we move, people move, children move around—another child protection agency can enter that child's name and go, "Oh, they've already had an interaction with ABC child protection." The problem is that there's no date stamp on when the individual file was accessed, or by whom. You actually have a situation where very, very private, personal, detailed information is in CPIN, and too many people can access it, and, more concerning, whoever accesses it is not checked. So I can't pull up my file and say, "The following four individuals from three different agencies in the province of Ontario have accessed my file." That is a problem. We have to solve the glitches—to be kind—that are occurring in CPIN as we expand it province-wide.

There's no argument, I don't believe, in the value of having a central database. The problem is, if you're going to have a central database, can you please make sure that it protects the people that you purport to protect?

Bill 89: For some time—well, 32 years, actually—this legislation has not been updated. I'm actually pleased that we're finally getting into some amendments and some updating. Some of the language is being changed, which is a positive thing.

The simple, tragic and unfortunate reason for why we need to reform the child welfare system is because of Katelynn Sampson and Jeffrey Baldwin and the coroners' inquests that followed.

The shocking and tragic death of Katelynn in 2008 drives home to me why we need to get this legislation right and that the details matter. The coroner's inquest into the death of Katelynn Sampson provided 54 recommendations to the Minister of Children and Youth Services alone, and 173 recommendations in total. The simple number of recommendations from the inquest indicates how much work there is to be done. For too long, there have been serious deficiencies in the system which have let our most vulnerable slip through the cracks. The knowledge that we need to do better grounds my support for this bill.

We certainly need to protect children from deadly or bodily harm, but we also have to consider the outcomes for children, their families and their communities. A common concern I hear regarding children who have been engaged with the child welfare system is the quality of their life during and after the time they enter child protection, mental health services or other services that the Ministry of Children and Youth Services provides.

According to the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, only 44% of former foster children graduate from high school, compared to 81% for the general population. Almost half of the estimated 8,000 Canadian youth experiencing homelessness this year lived in foster care or a group home. We need to do better.

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According to a study from Michelle Patterson from Simon Fraser University, "Studies of youth 'aging out' of the foster care system indicate between 11% and 36% experience street homelessness and approximately one third live with family, friends or acquaintances because they cannot afford permanent housing."

As we debate this legislation and hear from witnesses in committee, it is essential that we consider how the proposed legislation will impact children and how it will improve their lives during and after when they are in the child welfare system. I support Bill 89 and its attempts to ensure child safety. After 32 years, it's time. There are some important changes in this legislation, and I hope they will make significant differences for the safety and support of children in Ontario.

The most reported measure in the legislation is the expansion of the age of protection to include 16- and 17-year-olds. The expansion of the age of protection for these children has been widely advocated for by polit-

icians, advocates, service providers and children themselves. In my discussions since the legislation was introduced, the concept of expanding the age of protection has received widespread if not unanimous support.

Over the years, service providers have expressed serious concern about the lack of protection for 16- and 17-year-olds. Too often, these service providers are not able to help a child, who is clearly in need of assistance, because the act does not allow a child protection agency to make a temporary care agreement with children aged 16 or 17. The alternative for many of these children who need CAS protection could be staying in a dangerous or abusive situation, or running away and homelessness. The numbers prove that out.

Age should not be a determining factor for a child receiving a service which will help them achieve their potential. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child to include every human being below the age of 18. Providing services to a child to age 15 does not make sense when we know that people aged 16 and 17 are not only children, but they are also vulnerable to abuse by caregivers. We also know the ages of 16 and 17 are particularly important for development and times of great change for children. It seems prudent to ensure those kids receive the same support as their peers.

Under the current system, children are slipping through the cracks simply because of their age. In some cases, service providers are aware of a need to protect the child but are not allowed to act, because the individual is 16 or 17, unless they are already in care. Rather than another tragic example of a child not being recognized by the child welfare system as needing assistance, these instances are where service providers know of a child who needs help but the current legislative system means they cannot receive the help they need. The proposed legislation would address this discrepancy by requiring a children's aid society to protect children aged 16 and 17.

One potential positive that this part of the legislation may bring is an added lever for the province of Ontario to combat human trafficking. Human trafficking is a heinous crime where victims, mostly women and children, are forced to provide labour or sexual services through coercion, all for the direct profit of their traffickers.

Human trafficking affects children in every walk of life, but according to the RCMP's 2013 report, Domestic Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation in Canada, individuals are most susceptible to traffickers when they need financial support or desire love and affection. The RCMP's report also indicates that many victims are runaways from group homes or their primary caregiver's residence.

The RCMP report also points to a growing trend of youth being recruited from group homes. I want to repeat that: Kids in group homes, under the care of the province of Ontario, are being recruited by human traffickers. We have to do better.

Mental health disorders are also exploited by human traffickers. Specifically, the RCMP points to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD; fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, or FASD; and learning disability as mental health issues which make children more vulnerable to human trafficking. The ability for a CAS to protect children aged 16 and 17 at risk or currently being trafficked is a positive element of this legislation.

Speaker, I'm sure that you are aware of the great work of my colleague the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, and her advocacy on the issue of human trafficking in Ontario. I sat on the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment with the member, and Ms. Scott—Laurie—truly led the charge for the select committee recognizing the significant problem of human trafficking in Ontario and sharing some surprising and disturbing facts that many in the public are not aware of.

While we assume that human trafficking is more commonly associated with foreign victims crossing international borders, in fact, the committee revealed that over 90% of the victims in Canada are trafficked domestically. Shockingly, the province of Ontario is home to 65% of the human trafficking cases reported in Canada. Between 2007 and 2013, 75% of the 78 human trafficking charges laid in Ontario occurred in the GTA. Only 10% of the charges occurred outside the GTA and the Golden Horseshoe.

I think this is an important time to remember that Ontario is actually the only province left in Canada that does not protect children up to 18. I would suggest to you that there is a cause and effect that is happening on the human trafficking side. If 65% of the human trafficking cases Canada-wide are in Ontario, and we're the only ones who aren't protecting children up to the age of 18, methinks there is a problem.

The select committee recommended that "the Ontario government provide resources for the development of a coordinated approach to help victims of human trafficking, allowing providers of support services and the criminal justice system to share information and work collaboratively," and that "the Ontario government develop a multi-ministerial, province-wide strategy on human trafficking."

While the ability of child protection agencies to protect children aged 16 and 17 may help service providers keep young girls safe, there is still work that needs to be done to help stop this crime from occurring. Overall, there has been widespread and long-term support of expanding the age of protection. Even the ministry's own 2015 review of the CFSA indicated that they had received 10,000 signatures on a petition to raise the age of protection to 18. The ministry was aware of the broad support and widespread calls for this change to be initiated. The government, however, seems to have neglected several legislative opportunities to take this necessary step.

You may recall that the Progressive Conservative caucus has had two separate private member's bills calling for the expansion of the age of protection to include 16- and 17-year-olds. Former Barrie MPP Rod Jackson's Bill 88 proposed allowing temporary care agreements to

be made with children aged 16 and 17. Rod Jackson's advocacy on this issue put the troubling scenario of children aged 16 and 17 being turned away from service into the spotlight and provided a straightforward solution, which all three parties supported.

Mr. Jackson's advocacy on this issue led to him being presented with the annual Youth Legal Services Award. The award is given to an individual who has provided an outstanding contribution to the lives of street-involved youth, both by supporting the Street Youth Legal Services program and by acting as a motivator and leader in reducing youth homelessness.

While Bill 88 did not receive royal assent, his proposed legislation helped pave the way for the proposed legislation, Bill 89, which we are debating today, so my congratulations to Rod Jackson for his work and advocacy finally being adopted. While private member's bills often get stuck in committee despite having support from all three parties, it's a victory when an individual's solution to a problem is put into legislation. Well done, Rod.

More recently, the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry proposed similar legislation in Bill 32, the Right to Care Act, in 2016. So the government has had two separate opportunities in the last four years to address what many saw as an obvious gap in child care. MPP Rod Jackson's Bill 88 was sent to third reading. I'll just say that four years ago we could have done this. Well done for finally getting there, four years later. By creating a legislative mandate to protect these children, it is my hope that it will create another lever for the government to address the heinous crime of human trafficking.

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To recap: The expansion of the age of protection to 18 has had all-party support for some time. It was widely supported by advocates and service providers, and can provide a series of positive repercussions on vulnerable children, including protecting children from human trafficking.

But it took 14 years for this government to get around to making the necessary changes. This begs the question: What took so long? The government has had 14 years in office and two private members' bills to make this widely called-for and necessary change. It's a shame that the change is only coming before us now.

Service providers support the move because when a child slips through the cracks of child protection, it can be felt in other areas of the child welfare system. I'll give you an example.

I was approached by an individual who told me a story. Two girls who clearly had issues were in a home. The one child was 16; the other child was eight. Now, there's a thing that happens in the late teenage years, and that thing, as my colleague from Thornhill mentioned, is that they start to assert themselves more. Trust me, Speaker. I have two teenagers; I know whereof I speak.

The 16-year-old said, "Enough is enough. This is not right, what's happening in my home, in my family, and I'm going to make it better for my sister, because I'm about to leave. I'm out of here soon."

So she told a trusted teacher. The trusted teacher called the children's aid society. The children's aid society opened an investigation. They said, "Yes, in fact, there is an issue in this family and we must deal with it." What did they do, Speaker? They took the eight-year-old and put the eight-year-old in care. That child is now getting assistance; there's now going to be some help.

Guess what happened to the 16-year-old, Speaker? Nothing. So now that child is actually in more danger. The pressure points and the issues that were happening in the family have just been blown apart, because now they know someone blew the whistle, and that 16-year-old became far more at risk.

So what does the 16-year-old do? The 16-year-old doesn't have the option of going into the child protection system, so the 16-year-old is faced with, "Do I stay in a home that is hurting me, that is dysfunctional? Or do I choose homelessness? Do I choose the street?"

That's what we're doing by not making these changes. That is a true story provided to me from a worker. So we can't sit around and delay this. We have to get moving, because children's lives are in the balance.

The government needs to seriously consider how the expansion of the age of protection will affect the abilities of children's aid societies to provide effective service. I'm sure the last thing this government wants is to seek to protect more children, only to spread the current resources too thin, leaving vulnerable children without the help they need.

To add to the concern about ensuring effective service, it appears that concerns about the funding model of the CASs across the province is boiling over in several labour disputes. The minster would be aware that between September 18 and December 15 of last year, 435 front-line, administrative and support staff at Peel Children's Aid went on strike. The strike was, according to the numbers provided by the Ministry of Labour collective bargaining information services list, the largest number of person-days lost since the ministry started tracking strikes at children's aid societies. It was also the largest strike in terms of the number of employees involved.

Now, of course, we are aware that 140 workers are locked out at the Nipissing and Parry Sound children's aid society.

If there is a growing trend of labour disputes at children's aid societies, the minister must be concerned and be advocating to deal with the financial pressures of children's aid societies across the province, because you are expanding their mandate. After all, the resulting labour disputes have the potential to have our most vulnerable children slip through the cracks yet again.

I believe the government needs to seriously consider making an appropriate funding allocation, along with the expansion of the age of protection to 16 and 17, so we can ensure that children who need protection receive it.

I think it's important to note that, while we're talking about protecting and expanding 16 to 17, there is no one in the province of Ontario who has yet to actually give

me what kind of numbers that could involve. How much of an expansion are we talking about? Is it 1,000 children? Is it 5,000 children? Is it 10,000 children? If the ministry can't answer that question, then you are going to have a very challenging time funding and dealing with the children's aid societies, who, back to the directives and "thou shalts"—"Thou shalt now be responsible for this additional responsibility."

Another example of where the government has not taken action can be seen in the recent Auditor General's report on children and youth mental health. The auditor found that, despite concerns being articulated in 2003 about the oversight of the children and youth mental health program, the ministry still does not "monitor and effectively administer this program to ensure that children and youth in need of mental health services are provided with timely, appropriate and effective mental health services, and to ensure that mental health services are delivered efficiently." This is on top of a 50% increase since 2008-09 of hospitalization for mental health problems.

Guess what happens when children don't get service? Guess what happens when treatment is not in place, when wait-lists are your option? When you go into crisis, you get hospitalized—a 50% increase since 2008-09 of hospitalizations for mental health problems.

The auditor recommended that the ministry should define program requirements and monitor whether children and youth mental health agencies are delivering mental health services according to ministry requirements.

The auditor also recommended that the ministry should establish accountability agreements that clearly describe the responsibilities of both the ministry and the lead child and youth mental health agencies.

Part III of the legislation has many provisions that allow the ministry to do what the auditor proposed. Good. It requires a society to enter into an accountability agreement with the minister as a condition of receiving funding. I want to remind people that children's aid societies in the province of Ontario cannot pass a deficit budget. So there are controls. What you need to do, now that you've told them what you want them to do, is that now you have to properly fund it.

It also provides the ministry the authority to request the collection of information. If you don't measure a problem, you don't know there's a problem and you can't fix it. Children are falling through the cracks because we don't know who they are, where they are or what they need. This begs the question: How many more children are we going to be able to assist when we expand that age from the current age-out at 16 to 18?

We are left with a similar question to the one surrounding expanding the age of protection: What took you so long? The Auditor General pointed, nearly 14 years ago, to the failure of effectively overseeing youth mental health dollars. Only now does it appear that the government is providing itself the levers or the desire to start tracking the services it provides.

If you take a look at the information provided by Children's Mental Health Ontario, the need to ensure that children are receiving care is obvious. According to CMHO, children in the Ottawa region are waiting on average 575 days for counselling and therapy. That's a year and a half. That's insane. When you consider the rapidity of a child's development and the changing needs and mind, the notion of waiting 575 days is shocking.

I'm even more frustrated by the lack of progress in assisting our young people when I think about the 18 months I spent on the Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions. We presented 23 recommendations with all-party support seven years ago; yet, here we are: a 50% increase in hospitalization. Clearly there was a problem, clearly we gave some solutions that had all-party support, and we're still waiting.

There seems to be a trend emerging where the solutions with broad support that could make serious benefits to children's lives are not acted upon. I hope that the government takes the new powers the legislation gives to start effectively tracking the services it provides to ensure that its funding and services are what children need.

I've heard concerns from individuals about the powers given to the minister under part III of the legislation. My colleague from Thornhill covered a lot of this. I think what I really want to reinforce is a couple of things.

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The expansion to 16- and 17-year-olds is a good thing. Get on with it. Make sure you fund it appropriately. Don't ignore the treatment that needs to happen on the children and mental health side, because we have waiting lists all across the province. I happened to highlight one in Ottawa, but I can give you examples in the north, in Niagara, in London. They're all, frankly, horrendous. These are children who—when you actually treat them as the illnesses are emerging, you can make a real difference and move forward in their lives. If you let it fester, if you let it lead, if—God forbid—you let it age out and they have to go to an adult mental health waiting list, then we've only exacerbated the problem. So we really need to deal with that.

Again, children's aid societies—and I'll go back to my original opening comment: You are encouraging children's aid societies to amalgamate. But you don't say why. You don't explain how that makes better child protection in the province of Ontario. In fact, I would argue it's quite the opposite. What you're doing is, you're taking the community away from the child protection agency.

If I can brag for a minute, I have a relatively small child protection agency—one of the largest and one of the smallest. They're both very effective because they are community-led. We have volunteers who are sitting on those boards, and the only reason they're doing it, trust me, is not for free coffee. It's because they want to make a difference in the lives of children in our community.

I hope that in the two-minute response, we get some kind of explanation as to why you think amalgamation is the be-all solution for this problem, because I don't think it is. I think you need to properly fund and allow communities to do what they do best, which is help their most vulnerable.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Miss Monique Taylor: I'd like to congratulate the member from Thornhill, who is the new critic to children and youth services, on her half-hour portion of this debate, and then the member from Dufferin–Caledon, the previous critic, and her thoughtful interpretation of Bill 89, Supporting Children, Youth and Families Act.

It's an intensive 300-page bill, so there's a lot in this. It's not often that we change an entire act. We're pleased to see that this is before us, but we understand the concerns. A few of those same concerns that I'm noting, I also heard within the PC lead. We heard things about "thou shalt." Well, within this bill, there are so many "mays" instead of "thou shalt," they're concerning to us.

The members talked about CPIN and the concerns that are happening there. It's a real fact that there's a deficit in the funding when it comes to children's aid societies regarding the CPIN information. Children's aid societies were not given nearly enough dollars to make sure that the implementation went smoothly. They're way over budget on the CPIN, yet they're still facing difficulties. I've heard stories that when they're punching children in that they know for sure are there, those children are not in the system.

We have missing people in the Child Protection Information Network. We have a very intense procedure for being able to get to the information that they're actually looking for, and that is just causing more burden on the children's aid society workers who are already completely overworked, with less resources.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to thank the member from Thornhill, the member from Dufferin–Caledon and the member from Hamilton Mountain for their comments today. Two minutes isn't a long time. I'm going to try and get through a few points that I think are very necessary at this time.

The changes to the children's aid societies are absolutely going to be transformational. We know that the public expects the best for our children's aid societies and those that offer protection to children and youth. That is why this proposed legislation is going to strengthen the ministry's ability to hold children's aid services accountable for the service they provide, and for the management of the funds. That is critical.

The legislation will also give the minister the authority to appoint or replace a minority of board members, including the chair, and to appoint a supervisor temporarily to operate and manage a society where it is deemed appropriate.

But, Speaker, let me be clear. Absolutely no decisions have been made on society amalgamations at this time. We know that amalgamations can support more consistent service delivery and access to high-quality care. Societies that have chosen to voluntarily amalgamate have improved the delivery of services and the quality of services to families. They have improved their governance and they are now better serving all regions in the province.

The proposed legislation would give the minister the authority to compel two or more children's aid societies to amalgamate where it is in the public interest to do so. However, we do recognize that amalgamations are a very complicated exercise, and our government is committed to a thoughtful and consultative approach.

I do want to also acknowledge and congratulate the member from Thornhill for an excellent job this morning on her 30 minutes. She's captured lots of the relevant points in the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Harris: I will concur with my colleague across the aisle. I would also like to congratulate both our colleagues here, the members for Thornhill and Dufferin–Caledon, on an excellent one-hour leadoff on Bill 89, the Supporting Children, Youth and Families Act.

Speaker, of course when we're talking about families, children and CASs, I want to get out quickly an issue that was brought to me by a constituent when it comes to adoption. There has been a program in place now for some time. I believe it's to encourage families to not just foster but then to adopt. There is a case where a family adopted siblings from a mother that the CAS was involved with. The rules state that the income threshold for targeted subsidies is based on the average income of a two-parent family with children in 2011. So there's the potential for a third sibling to be put up for adoption, and this family, of course, wants to keep the children together; the CAS does as well. But as soon as they exceed the $93,700, they're completely ineligible for this funding. I did write the minister a letter on this. I had a chance to speak to him again last night about it. I think it's important that they look at this to allow for—you know, the minute he makes $93,800, they're completely cut off. Of course, we want to keep these children together.

I may have an opportunity to get more into his letter in the next two-minute go-round, because I know I'll have, hopefully, an opportunity to do my 10 or 20 minutes on this particular bill.

But I want to thank my colleagues for an excellent job this morning. We look forward to further debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to thank the members from Thornhill and Dufferin–Caledon as well, who brought some very thoughtful discussions here this morning, particularly the last member who closed on her remarks. You really care about this issue. That definitely came out in the words and your comments that you brought out this morning.

That brings me to looking forward to—this morning, I was hoping to start hearing some of the comments from our member, the member from Hamilton Mountain. I know she's been a huge, huge advocate on these issues. I'm looking to learn from her in looking at further debate on this particular bill.

Mr. Speaker, let's not kid ourselves: This is a big bill. It's going to require a lot of discussion. We've had some systematic problems within the children's aid society for far too long. Many of our children have been falling through the gaps. It's not by a want or a will. It's just by having those services that have not been appropriate—and the funding levels for these individuals who have the care, who have a conscience, who are trying their best to bring in the service for these kids in their care.

There's a big component out of this bill that I'm going to be looking forward to, because many of my First Nations—across my riding, I have 21 of them. A lot of them are looking to step forward to getting the care under their own umbrella for their community members, because who better to care for First Nations kids, respecting their traditions, their culture, their way of learning and their language? They've been at this for well over 25 years.

This is a bill that we got on December 8, just last year, and here we are. It's going to take a lot of discussion in order to get this through and to get it right. I look forward to having the debate with members from all sides of this room.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Thornhill has two minutes.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I want to thank my colleague the member for Dufferin–Caledon, the member for Hamilton Mountain, and the members for Kitchener–Conestoga and Algoma–Manitoulin for their comments.

I want to just touch on a couple of quick things. One is that I mentioned many of the family lawyers that I had spoken to, and there seemed to be a consensus that there was a problem with CPIN in terms of being able to search within documents.

We all know that one of the key points of having a computerized system is so that you can do multiple searches, not just one search; you can do all kinds of complicated searches. For example, in medical records, you could search a medication. If there's a problem with a batch of medication, search for a medication. It goes through everybody's file and it prints out everybody's name who is on that medication. You can imagine what kind of time it would take to go through paper charts looking for that kind of information.

The lawyers say that, yes, they can get a printed copy of a chart, but it's very repetitive because of the way it's designed. It doesn't have a system in place to erase stuff that's repeating the same page or paragraph or box that it was in. They can't search within a document. They can't search for a keyword or a certain name. They could get pages and pages for a child's document, and they have to read through it if they want to find something. That's really redundant and a waste of everybody's time, especially if the lawyers are charging a client, or they're legal aid lawyers and they're charging the taxpayer.

I would like to see some huge improvements in terms of the searchability of CPIN.

I also want to remind everybody that October is Child Abuse Prevention Month. It's important in our community that we have to speak out. The child welfare workers are there to help the children, but they can't be the eyes and ears in every community. We need people to get involved and to speak out and to not just use social media for the day or the month, but to use it to break the silence.

We had 165,000 referrals in Ontario to our aid societies in 2015-16. That number is rising. It's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker.

We need to ensure that our children are safe as much as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I see, in the members' gallery, Louis Roesch from Chatham-Kent. I'd like to welcome Louis to Queen's Park. He is from the OFA and a business person in Chatham-Kent. Welcome.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I have two guests up from the University of Windsor today. Professor Brian E. Brown and Dr. Jamey Essex are over here. Welcome again to Queen's Park.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, I know there are number of folks from the OFA here today, but I want to make special mention of Bruce Buttar from the riding of Northumberland–Quinte West. Welcome, Bruce, along with all your friends.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'd like to welcome to the members' gallery today Philip Menecola. He is a third-year Ryerson University politics and governance student who is on placement in my office until the end of March. Welcome, Philip.

Miss Monique Taylor: I had the privilege of speaking with the Dietitians of Canada this morning. I would like to welcome some dietitians from Hamilton. We have Wendy Gamblen and Michele MacDonald Werstuck. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I'd like to welcome to the Legislature, from the beautiful community of Leamington, my OLIP intern, Hannah Iles.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: We have Dr. April James from Nipissing University here today, with the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd also like to welcome my friends from the OFA, particularly a close personal friend, Peggy Brekveld.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'd like to introduce all of CanWEA here today and also welcome the president of CanWEA, Robert Hornung. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very happy to welcome the mother of page captain Kyra Labonte. Her mother, Melanie Filotas, is in the public gallery this morning.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am pleased to welcome guests of page captain Jack Ryan today from Oshawa.

His mother, Jane Ryan, joins us, and his nana, Anne Marie Beattie. Welcome to the Legislature.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would like to give a big welcome to all the members of OCUFA, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations. It's a great bunch of people doing great work instructing and researching and doing all the good stuff in our universities.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Please join me in welcoming representatives from the OFA: Keith Currie, president of zone 13, which is Peel, Simcoe and York; Bruce Buttar, director of zone 12, which is Hastings, Lennox and Addington, Northumberland and Prince Edward county; and Louis Roesch, director, zone 1, Essex and Kent. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: The Canadian Federation of Students are with us today as well. I have four introductions from down my way: Ronald D'Aguilar, Youshaa El-Abed, Danjel Popaj and Justine De Jaegher. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd like to welcome to Queen's Park the Dietitians of Canada, including regional executive director Jennifer Buccino and government relations coordinator Leslie Whittington-Carter, as well as other dietitian members of the association.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I'd like to welcome to the Legislature today the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, including Drew Spoelstra from Niagara Peninsula.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On behalf of the member from Mississauga South, I would like to recognize guests of page captain Connor Ludwig today. His parents, Sue and Michael Ludwig, are in the public gallery this morning.

Also, join me in welcoming all of our friends from the Canadian Wind Energy Association, particularly president Robert Hornung, whom I had the opportunity to speak with earlier.

Mr. Norm Miller: I would like to welcome, from the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Association who I met with today, Dr. Henry Hornstein from Algoma University, Dr. Gautam Das from Lakehead University, Dr. Brian Ross from the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, Dr. April James from Nipissing University and executive director Dr. Mark Rosenfeld from OCUFA. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to welcome—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Trinity–Spadina.

Interjections.

Mr. Han Dong: Sorry, Speaker, I didn't hear you. I would like to also welcome the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations to Queen's Park today. I encourage all members to join them at their reception in committee rooms 228 and 230 between 4:30 and 6 o'clock this evening.

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to welcome the Dietitians of Canada, who are here this morning. We got to join for breakfast. There's Leslie Whittington-Carter, Jennifer Buccino, Angela Cuddy, Marilee Stickles-White and Wendy Gamblen.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I would like to thank President Keith Currie, the president of OFA, and to take a moment to thank the OFA for their delicious breakfast this morning at the Legislature and all the great work they do for Ontario's agri-food sector. There are five OFA board members sitting in the members' gallery this morning that I would like to recognize: Louis Roesch, Bruce Buttar, Peggy Brekveld, Larry Davis and Réjean Pommainville. We welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. Granville Anderson: I would like to welcome Mikael Eklund, who is an associate professor at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology. Welcome.

Mr. Grant Crack: It's a great pleasure for me to also welcome the members of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture who are with us this morning, as well as my friend Monsieur Réjean Pommainville, qui habite dans la municipalité de La Nation. Bienvenue, monsieur Pommainville, aussi.

Ms. Soo Wong: I would like to welcome my intern. I just noticed she's sneaking into the chamber gallery, so I want to welcome Leslie Munoz, who is my intern for this session.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I would like to welcome today to the gallery the teams from the Second Harvest, GreenScience Technologies, Club Coffee, Repair Café and Flashfood, who would like to invite you to the launch of the long-term circular economy and zero waste strategy. They have booths over just across the hall, from all of those. I know my critics are joining me to launch the strategy and to introduce you to some of Ontario's circular businesses.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions? Seeing no further introductions: In the Speaker's gallery today are guests of mine, acquaintances and friends. Joining me, with a lifetime of experience as an executive on the OFA, is a friend of mine, Larry Davis. Thank you, Larry, for joining us.

Also, from Ducks Unlimited, we have Patti Ronald. Thank you for joining us, Patti.

Mr. John Yakabuski: When's Joe Peters coming back? When's your brother coming back?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I banned him.

I welcome all of our guests to the House.

It is now therefore time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Again, as the Liberals always do, they play a shell game. The latest shell game is shifting hydro bills around. We saw it with the clean energy rebate being replaced with the HST rebate, while people's bills still go up.

The latest leaked plan suggests that costs from your hydro bill will shift to your tax bill. Mr. Speaker, HST, income tax, the fees: The money needs to come from somewhere. Will this government come clean and acknowledge that, in their leaked plans, taxes are going to go up? They're simply playing a shell game.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'm very proud to say that we're balancing the books. I'm proud to say that we've reduced our deficit, as of December, to $1.9 billion, $2.5 billion above plan.

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We're taking every step necessary to protect the interests of all Ontarians and taxpayers to ensure that we invest in the things that matter for the long term to make us competitive.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I just want to remind members I have to hear your questions and answers. When those kinds of ovations take place, and the interjections, it just simply raises the temperature in the House. I'd appreciate it not happening. Also, the responses to those—it would be helpful not to do that.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: But there's so much to applaud.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Timmins–James Bay, I don't need your editorial. Thank you. I'm being serious here.

Supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of Finance. Rather than answer a question on hydro, the government chooses to cheer their government talking points.

I will once again try to ask a question about hydro. Ontarians are struggling with their hydro bills, and I'd appreciate an answer to a question on hydro.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Durham, come to order.

Mr. Patrick Brown: This is the government that introduced the global adjustment. This is the government that for those 30 bad contracts that they're now saying they might look at, they received $1.3 million in donations.

My question is: Will the Minister of Finance come clean and acknowledge that this latest leaked plan is simply a shell game of shifting funds from the hydro bill to the tax base?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The member opposite hasn't produced any plan whatsoever. What we have done is invest over $50 billion to $60 billion in new hydro construction: more transmission facilities, more clean power plants, enabling us to get off dirty coal and ensure we protect our environment.

At the same time, we now have greater integrity in the system, which we didn't have when the Conservatives were in power. We had blackouts and lots of brownouts. We are ensuring that in the future, that does not happen. We're investing to protect the interests of all Ontarians and ensuring that our electricity rates go down to protect and mitigate those increased costs.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Start the clock. Order, please. Thank you.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Minister of Finance. The Minister of Finance brags that there are less brownouts, but the reality is there are more. Since 2012, there have been 275% more power outages. So the system is not more reliable.

You signed bad contracts. This government signed bad contracts. They brought in the global adjustment. They have created a mess. Rather than simply giving the government talking points, what I'd like is for the Minister of Finance to apologize to the people of Ontario and say he's going to return the donations that the Liberal Party got for these bad contracts.

Will the Minister of Finance at least encourage the Premier to return those donations for those bad contracts?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to stand and speak to this, of course, Mr. Speaker, because Ontarians do remember those rolling brownouts and the blackouts and the smog days. Those are a thing of the past, thanks to this government. We invested $50 billion in generation and transmission—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the PCs forget what it was like when they were in government. You know what, they're desperate to create a problem when there is none—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I bet I can stand for 54 minutes. If the comments continue, I will.

As soon as I sit down, if it starts, I stand again.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pointing to power outages from falling trees and dump trucks hitting lines—we've actually made sure that we've built a system that is reliable, one that we can rely on. That's what we've seen right across the province with the $50 billion of—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Your time is up. Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: New question.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Sorry, new question.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Since I can't get an answer on the Liberal donations for these bad contracts, since I can't get an answer—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is never a bad time to stand and withdraw something that you said that

shouldn't be said—because I couldn't pinpoint who it was. I don't think that that's parliamentary. I think it's time for us to elevate our game here.

Finish your question, please.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, since I can't get an answer on the massive increase in power outages, let me try a different tack. We all know about Frank Dottori, an absolute legend in the forestry sector. He brought his hydro bill to the finance committee. The bill was $12,600, but only $363 was actual electricity. The rest was the Liberal global adjustment, delivery fees and taxes.

I understand the Minister of Energy is going around saying everything is rosy; everything is fine with hydro. Will the Minister of Energy acknowledge that this is a huge problem for the forestry sector?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: We've been working very hard as a government to ensure that we have a reliable system and a clean system. But when you're looking at the forestry sector—I acknowledge the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the MPP from Thunder Bay, the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. They have done great work in ensuring that our forestry sector is actually saving money on their electricity bills through the NIER Program. The Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program is saving forestry companies 25% on their energy bills. They have some of the lowest rates not only in Ontario, not only in Canada, but right across North America. We're seeing a success in this sector. We're going to continue to find ways to help that business continue to grow and prosper.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Minister of Energy: The Minister of Energy says they're working hard on hydro and forestry. Stop working hard, because we've lost 50% of our forestry jobs. Our hydro bills are skyrocketing—among the worst in North America. Again, listen to what those in the industry are saying. Frank was wondering why we're killing jobs in Ontario because of hydro. In his own words, he said, "Most jurisdictions use energy costs to promote economic development, not kill jobs, which is what we're doing in Ontario."

The government can throw out any number they want, any talking point they want, but will the Minister of Energy at least acknowledge that we have a hydro crisis and it is killing jobs in the forestry sector? It is killing jobs in northern Ontario. Will you at least acknowledge we have a crisis here?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I also, again, want to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs for pointing out that Resolute in Thunder Bay, because of their low energy costs—not only with the NIER Program but with some of the other programs that we've brought forward as a government—are actually seeing this facility being either the first- or second-lowest in terms of energy costs in their entire fleet.

But we recognize that there is more that can be done and will be done—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nipissing, come to order.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: —and that's why we continue to bring forward a plan. We are—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Right after I asked the member to come to order, he continues. I would ask the member to come to order.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So we're bringing forward a plan. We've already helped reduce rates by 8%. We're going to be doing more, and that's a lot more than what the opposition has done, because they never invested in the electricity sector. The example is the rolling brownouts and blackouts that we saw before we took power.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Minister of Energy: The Minister of Energy says they're acting. They got rid of the clean energy rebate and replaced it with an HST rebate. Bills are still going up. The forestry sector is still struggling. We've lost 52% of our forestry jobs. There is nothing to celebrate here. You are killing jobs. This government is killing jobs in northern Ontario.

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It's more than simply hydro. What Frank passed on to the finance committee in terms of this crisis—he said that he has been in business for 40 years and, for 40 years, aside from the hydro, what he has actually seen is red tape triple—absolutely triple—in the forestry sector. It took him eight months to open a gravel pit to repair roads.

Mr. Speaker, it's bad enough that they've created a crisis in hydro. How can they allow a crisis in red tape?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: The Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Speaker, let's talk about red tape, because this government, this province, is leading the world when it comes to reducing regulatory burden. We've reduced 80,000 regulatory burdens over the years—80,000. We have before the House a bill called the Burden Reduction Act. That's going to save between $13 million and $31 million for businesses. We have our Red Tape Challenge, which is out there helping small, medium and large businesses save hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars.

This government is leading the way when it comes to reducing regulatory burden. Our Open for Business program has been a huge success. We've been nominated more than any other province in this country by the CFIB for their Golden Scissors Award, acknowledgement from a third party that we're reducing the regulatory burden for businesses in this province better than anyone in the country and better than anyone in the world.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Acting Premier. On Monday, the Premier indicated that she believes that there is no link between public affordable hydro and lower hydro rates. The Premier also claims to like to make decisions based on evidence. So let's look at the facts: Manitoba has a publicly owned hydro system, and their rate per kilowatt hour is 7.38 cents. Ontario's system is, of course, a private system, and during mid-peak times our rate per kilowatt hour is 13.2 cents—almost double. Even during off-peak hours, Ontario families and businesses pay more than Manitoba.

Can the government indicate now, looking at these facts, that there is absolutely no link between public ownership and lower hydro rates?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm pleased to rise and respond to that question because, of course, Quebec and Manitoba are blessed with geography. They have legacy hydro. Going back and talking about Manitoba—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Same rule applies.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Speaking of Manitoba, when they were in power they cancelled the Conawapa program and made sure they cancelled the conservation program as well.

We've actually rebuilt a system that we can be proud of and that is reliable and clean. We're making sure that we take it to the next level and make it as affordable as possible for as many people in this province as we can.

When we're looking at broadening the ownership of Hydro One, we're on track to raise the $9 billion that we intended to put into infrastructure to continue to build Ontario up.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: It looks like the government is unconvinced.

The government mentioned Quebec. Let's talk about Quebec. A family across the border, our neighbour in Quebec, if they look at their bill—they also have a publicly owned system—they would see a rate of just 5.71 cents per kilowatt hour—5.71 cents. If an Ontario family looked at their bill and they did something as wild as trying to cook dinner for their children before off-peak hours set in at 7 p.m., they could see rates as high as 18 cents per kilowatt hour—18 cents.

How can the government deny the connection when the facts state very clearly that public hydro systems are more affordable and more cost-beneficial than the private systems that we've seen so far?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: It's obvious to me now that the NDP has no idea how our energy system in this province works. We actually need to generate power. We don't have the benefit of geography like they do in Quebec and like they do in Manitoba. We need to build our generation. We do have some hydroelectric power, but there is a cost to nuclear, there is a cost to wind, there is a cost to solar—and we built that. We've done it, making sure that we can be clean and green and reliable.

The one thing that is very important for us, as a government, is that, when we rebuilt this system, one that governments of all stripes forgot about and never invested in, we actually made sure that we can now rely on this system. It cost us significant money, but we're going to make it as affordable as possible for people.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Lower hydro bills start with public ownership and public control of our electricity system. It's a fact.

But here's the problem for the Liberal government: The problem for the Liberal government is that public ownership of the hydro system benefits everyday Ontarians, and it benefits all of us. But all the evidence, all the facts point to this government and this Premier wanting to only help well-connected insiders. Their policies have only benefitted a small group of insiders on Bay Street, not the rest of Ontarians.

The Premier has purposely ignored people on Main Street to the benefit of the people on Bay Street time and time again. Why doesn't the government understand that when people pay for electricity, they don't expect to pay for the profits of private companies?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: The system that we have built in Ontario, the system that we've invested in—$50 billion in terms of generation and rebuilding transmission—benefits every single Ontarian.

When we're saving $4.3 billion in health care costs, that benefits everyone in this province. When our air pollution deaths have dropped 23%, that is significant and benefits everybody in this province. When we have our air pollution hospitalizations drop by 41%, that benefits every single Ontarian.

So we'll take no lessons from the party that has no idea about putting forward a plan that makes sure—all they're talking about is pushing ideas to the future. We're going to bring forward immediate relief to help—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Start the clock.

New question.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question, again, is to the Acting Premier. Yesterday, the Premier said that she didn't believe that Ontario could have an affordable, public hydro system and, at the same time, build infrastructure. She said it was an either/or; she couldn't stop her decision to sell off Hydro One.

I'm sorry to bring facts into this argument, but we've been doing that for a long time, actually. We've been

building infrastructure and at the same time maintaining a public, affordable hydro system.

When the Yonge subway line was built in Toronto, the government didn't have to sell off hydro. When the University subway line was built, we also had public, affordable hydro systems. When the Bloor-Danforth line was built, there was no sell-off. Even Mike Harris built the Sheppard line before trying to sell off Hydro One.

It's not a surprise. In this province, we have built public infrastructure, transportation infrastructure and maintained a public, affordable hydro system. So why does the government think that it can't be done, when it's been done so many times before?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm delighted to have the chance to speak about the incredibly ambitious and unprecedented transit projects that our government is investing in currently.

No other government in Ontario history has invested as much and as consistently in public transit right across the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, in Waterloo, in Ottawa and in the 99 communities across this province that have public transit systems. Those are communities that, by example, are benefitting from the doubling of the gas tax program that the Premier recently announced just a couple of weeks ago, which is great news for all those communities.

I've said this before in this Legislature: Just for once, I would be delighted to hear a member of the NDP caucus stand up and provide people in this chamber and those watching at home with any sense of a plan to build public transit in the GTHA or beyond. They've never presented that plan. Perhaps in the follow-up question, that member from Brampton will provide some semblance of a plan.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, the first step of that plan will be to win the election and to remove the Liberals from power.

For 100 years, Ontario has had public, affordable—

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Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Municipal Affairs, come to order. Although he hides behind other members, I can still hear him.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: People in Ontario don't buy the Liberals' false choices, that we can't have a public hydro system and still build infrastructure. For 100 years, we've had affordable public hydro. We built highways. We built bridges. We've connected Kenora to Ottawa and Timmins to Windsor. We can build infrastructure and maintain a public, affordable hydro system. How can the Premier continually state that Ontario can't do this when we've done it so many times before?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I think everybody in this province knows that in the last election campaign the people of Ontario had a chance to review that very thin platform from that party. They rejected it: nothing on transit; nothing on transportation. Two and a half years later, we see they still present nothing.

Every single project we brought forward—the Eglinton Crosstown; support for the Scarborough subway; building the Finch West LRT; the Hurontario LRT; the Hamilton LRT; support for Waterloo's ION LRT, support for the LRT in Hamilton; support for doubling of the gas tax and so much more that we are doing in every corner of Ontario, including Bramalea–Gore–Malton—that party consistently rejects our plan to move the province forward, to build more transit, put more transit into service, providing a stronger economy and a more positive quality of life for the people who we, on this side of the House, are damn proud to represent.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I'm going to ask the member to withdraw.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: But what a good clip.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean–Carleton, please come to order.

I want to make sure she heard me.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Oh, yeah, I did.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'll help.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Don't help her.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: All across Ontario, we built schools, we built hospitals, we built libraries, we built public pools, courthouses, waterworks, all without—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I did have plans to make some kind of remark on this side, but when the other side starts to dive into it, it makes it hard for me to throw that out. But I always try to be unique, and one side or the other, I might decide one side needs to be on warnings and the other side not, if that would help.

Please finish.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: So we built schools, we built hospitals. We built all this infrastructure, all without selling our affordable public hydro system. We've done it all. When the Premier states that Ontario can't build public infrastructure, can't build transportation infrastructure, can't build public transit without selling off affordable public hydro, how does she expect the people of this province to believe that?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I have to say on behalf of everyone on this side of the House that I want to thank the member from the NDP caucus for belatedly recognizing what everybody in Ontario knows: Premier Kathleen Wynne and our government are consistently building the province up, investing in infrastructure. Hopefully

with their support we'll continue to be able to do that. Thank you so much. It's greatly appreciated.

At the end of the day, what the people of Ontario expect is, they expect a government that's able to do more things than one thing at a time and do it well. That member referenced health care infrastructure. He mentioned education infrastructure. I'm very proud, as Minister of Transportation, to be working with my colleagues to invest more in transit and transportation. We're going to keep doing it.

I hope this new spirit of openness and honesty and forthrightness in this chamber from that caucus will continue in the months ahead. Perhaps working together and maybe even working with the Tories, Speaker, we'll get more done for the people of Ontario.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you, Speaker, and good morning. My question is for the Minister of Energy this morning.

Ontarians are tired of these vague cabinet leaks and shell games with their hydro bills. If you believe the leaked story this morning in the Star, the Liberal government is about to make all Ontarians pay for the colossal failures of this government over the last eight years and the electricity crisis that they've created.

Is the government extending the payout period for electricity companies that donated $1.3 million to the Liberals? We want to know, yes or no. Is that going to happen in their plan? Why don't you deal with the actual crisis in electricity, which is the skyrocketing costs that go along with these fixed contracts that you've signed with renewable energy companies? Is this government committed to no longer signing expensive, fixed-rate contracts?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I know on this side of the House, we're very proud of the work that we've done with our renewable energy sector. I know CanWEA is here today. We've ensured that we've built a system with a supply mix that relies on renewable, that relies on nuclear, that relies on gas and water. We have a system that is the envy of North America. We have the States, we have many subnationals and we have many of our partner provinces calling us up and asking us to help them with the system that we've built.

We're going to continue, though, to find ways to reduce rates for people, families and businesses that are having a hard time making those payments. We will continue to work hard, but right now we're going to make sure that we bring forward this plan. We'll make sure that we have immediate relief for Ontarians in the very near future, but no decisions have been made at this time.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: One day the minister is saying, "What a great job we did;" the next day he's apologizing for the crisis they've created in electricity; and the next day he's saying he did a great job again. If you stick a quarter in this jukebox, you're going to get one of those records. That's what you're going to get from this Liberal minister.

If it was as easy as this morning's vague cabinet leak to fix this problem, then why didn't you do it years ago? Why didn't you fix the problem when Xstrata left Timmins to go to Quebec? Why didn't you do it when the greenhouses in southwestern Ontario went to Michigan? Why didn't you do it when businesses were telling you that their electricity prices were going up by double digits year after year after year? Why did you wait until a year out from an election to announce that you suddenly have a plan to solve the crisis that you created in electricity—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you. Order.

Minister?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Once again, I'm very pleased to rise to answer the question, because the one thing that the opposition member forgets about is it's this government that had to rebuild that system that actually had businesses shut down. They forget about that so quickly.

I know the Minister of Economic Development and Growth will want to talk about the constant growth we're seeing in this province, thanks to the efforts we're making to ensure that we can keep high-paying jobs in this province.

The one thing that the opposition member also forgets, and there are a lot of things that they forget to talk about, is that 42,000—42,000—high-paying, clean-sector jobs are now in this province thanks to the investments that we have made, which they voted against every single time.

I know the honourable member forgets a lot of the things that we do as a government, but I know the people of Ontario won't. I know our industry players don't forget that we are the party that's invested in—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Thank you.

New question.

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ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Acting Premier. I've been meeting with seniors in my riding who live on fixed incomes. They tell me they are forced to make tough choices while they're at home during the day. They are being forced to turn off the heat; they can't cook their meals. They can't stay up all night to shift their hydro usage to off-peak hours. For seniors, hydro is not a luxury the way it is for the Premier. Will the Liberal government scrap their ineffective time-of-use hydro pricing policies, as the NDP has proposed, and reduce hydro bills for seniors?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Once again, I'm pleased to rise. The whole reason why we're actually bringing forward a plan is to make sure that those families, those seniors who are struggling, who aren't seeing the benefit of our economic rebound, who don't necessarily see the benefit of us rebuilding the system—that we can actually find ways to help them even more. We've done that with the 8% reduction, but we know we can do more.

The Ontario Electricity Support Program is something that seniors can use and that many other families can use: those that use electric heat and those that need medical devices. That's why we recognize that we can find a way to do more. That's why we're actively working right now to find immediate relief.

I know the member opposite talked about the NDP proposal. There was nothing in that proposal that had immediate relief. We're working on finding a relief package that will be immediate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, the Liberal government's own report shows that time-of-use pricing does not encourage conservation or shift away the demand that the government has hoped for. All it has done is punish ratepayers who can't use hydro during off-peak hours, like seniors, like stay-at-home parents and like businesses. The Premier can reduce the bills of these ratepayers immediately by scrapping time-of-use pricing, as the NDP has proposed. Will the Liberal government scrap their ineffective time-of-use pricing policies now?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Absolutely not. What the NDP doesn't see is that by scrapping time of use, the rates for every single ratepayer in this province will go up. We're making sure that that's not going to happen. That's why we recognize that there are some families that actually could benefit from a different type of plan rather than time of use.

We've worked for the last six months with our system operator on having them come up with some alternatives for that type of program, but that type of program, that type of change, won't be immediate. That's what we're working on: immediate relief for families. They're talking about maybe some things that possibly might add up in the very, very far distant future. We're working right now for immediate relief.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure. On this side of the House, we know that infrastructure is about more than just bricks and mortar; it's about creating and sustaining jobs, growing the economy and enhancing the quality of life for all. That's why I'm proud that our government is making the largest investment in critical public infrastructure in this province's history: building the schools, the hospitals, the roads, the bridges and the public transit that Ontarians need to thrive in the 21st century in communities all across Ontario, including my own of Etobicoke–Lakeshore. This is not just putting shovels in the ground; it's putting people to work.

The opposition has been claiming that we just pay lip service to this. This is simply not the case. The Leader of the Opposition, in repeating it in speech after speech, is hoping nobody is paying attention to the facts. Facts still matter in this province. My question to the minister: Can he share the facts about our infrastructure investments?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Thank you to the member for the question. There are over $14 billion in major projects under way in this province as we speak, and Infrastructure Ontario is in the process of procuring $11.8 billion more. We have delivered 29 brand new schools; new courthouses in Durham, St. Thomas and Thunder Bay; the Herb Gray Parkway; the Union Pearson Express, and Highway 407 East. We have finished 100 major hospital projects, including a $474-million mental health facility in the Leader of the Opposition's own riding. Now he has been telling everyone who will listen that this government can't get shovels in the ground.

In the last three years of the Harris government, they spent just $2.2 billion a year on average in infrastructure.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Essex, come to order.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Now they have the gall to lecture us when we're spending six times that amount. Our investments in infrastructure are at historic levels.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: It's unfathomable to me that anyone paying attention could claim this government isn't getting shovels in the ground when there's over $14 billion of projects under construction as we speak. But perhaps the opposition isn't paying attention. If they were, they would know that in their leader's riding, the government is providing more than $10 million in formula funding this year alone.

It's of great importance to the Premier and to the minister to ensure that we are building up communities in every region of the province, from small towns to big cities. I know there are many funding programs, such as the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund and the Clean Water and Wastewater Fund, in place to help municipalities of all sizes.

Could the Minister of Infrastructure please explain what our government is doing to ensure that communities everywhere, including the leader's riding, are benefiting from this historic infrastructure investment?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The member mentioned OCIF and water, programs we are very proud of and that have been warmly welcomed by our municipal leaders. We are investing $100 million in expanding natural gas access to underserved areas in the province, something that party has never done. We are tripling our community infrastructure fund to $300 million, and we negotiated with the federal government to ensure that clean water and waste water funding flows to every municipality in Ontario. That means every member in this House, includ-

ing every member opposite, will see investments in their riding.

Everywhere you look in our great province, there's evidence of a major investment that is getting shovels in the ground and putting Ontarians to work. The Leader of the Opposition should look in the mirror and vote for Kathleen Wynne.

WASTE DIVERSION

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Minister of the Environment. On Monday in this House, the minister refused to accept responsibility for the Ontario Tire Stewardship program, suggesting instead it was the fault of the previous government. That statement was false. The Ontario Tire Stewardship was established in 2009, six years after the Liberal government was first elected.

Last February, the minister told this House that he would have the Ontario Tire Stewardship wound up within a year. Today is the first day of March. The year has now passed. Will the minister explain to this House why he missed his deadline for winding up the Ontario Tire Stewardship and why he is now planning to extend it by another 22 months?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I'm glad they are doing fact checking, Mr. Speaker, because the entire legislation that turned out to be problematic—which the member opposite agreed was not working—was passed by the Conservative government in 2002. That laid out a system that led to a series of market failures. You're quite correct about the tire stewardship organization, but I think a little humility on both sides would be helpful here because the system didn't work.

We had Bill 91 and Bill 93, both of which we couldn't get through this House and were stalled by the opposition, which would have fixed this years ago. We had not a single question for 18 months on any of the IFOs or stewardship programs by the party opposite until the government last year passed Bill 151 and there was a Toronto Star story. We got our first question.

We had already fixed the problem, Mr. Speaker, before they even—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary? The member for Huron–Bruce.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Back to the minister. I find it passing strange that this minister was not doing his own job, casting oversight on his own eco tax program, and now he's missing his own deadlines.

Beyond the alleged theft of half a million dollars under his nose, there's another issue the minister needs to own. OTS has a surplus of $50 million. That's right: OTS, an agency of this government, gouged Ontarians for an extra $50 million. When Ontarians buy new tires this spring, we're still going to pay that eco tax.

1120

Will the minister tell us where this extra money is going? What is it being used for?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Again, Mr. Speaker, this is passing precious and strange. The decision to turn the entire operation over to for-profit companies and pull the public sector out of it was a decision of the government opposite. We inherited that when it was all deployed, and tried to fix it on three separate occasions.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You're just a millisecond away from being warned.

Finish, please.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It was this Premier who, two years ago, said, "I'm not happy with this system," and ordered this minister to investigate. We then proposed radical restructuring and the elimination of the IFOs, in consideration that there were these risks. Then we ordered an investigation, which is currently under way, without any prompting from the opposition. Look at the owl; look at the eagle. We've done our job. When are you going to do yours?

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Acting Premier. A constituent of mine from Amherstburg, Mrs. Linda Eaton, shared her hydro bill with me. Last year, her bill was $372 for January. The Premier promised that bills would go down for rural ratepayers like Mrs. Eaton, but that's not what happened. This year, her January bill was over $500 for roughly the same amount of energy used, and her hydro delivery charge has doubled in two years.

Will the Premier provide real relief for ratepayers like Mrs. Eaton and reduce her rural delivery rates to what urban ratepayers pay, as New Democrats have proposed?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and respond because those Hydro One R2 customers, which are 330,000 households, have seen a $60 reduction off of their delivery line. That's because we acted when we heard that many in rural, remote and northern parts of our province are paying a higher amount.

We do recognize that we need to do more. That's why we're looking and working on a plan right now to provide more relief to specifically like the person that the honourable member mentioned, because R2 only provides that relief to 330,000 households. They do get that 8%, and we do recognize that those folks who do live in rural, remote or northern parts of our province do pay a higher proportion on their bills.

That's why we're continuing to act. They're seeing the benefits of a clean system, a reliable system and a green system. We're now going to make sure that we can make it as affordable as possible.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Speaker, forgive me, but it sounds like another Liberal stretch goal, like the 15% off auto insurance that we never saw. We won't hold our breath.

Mr. and Mrs. Eaton are seniors living on fixed incomes. They don't have access to natural gas and they don't have a choice but to heat with hydro. They've done

everything that the Premier has told them to do in order to lower their bills. They do their laundry and their dishes during off-peak hours. They keep their living room temperature at 18 degrees. They even keep their kitchen temperature at 13 degrees. But their hydro bills keep going up, even though the Premier has promised that they would go down. Will the Premier get rid of unfair rural delivery rates and reduce the bills for families like the Eatons?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: There are two parts within that question. The first one I'd like to respond to. It relates to natural gas. I think it's important to also highlight that our government is investing $100 million in a grant program to make sure that we can get natural gas out to as many communities as possible. I know that the Minister of Infrastructure has been spearheading that and doing a great job with that.

Applause.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Yes. When it comes to doing more for families like the honourable member mentioned, we do agree that more needs to be done. That's why we're working very hard right now on a plan that will provide immediate relief. We will make sure that we work on this plan and roll it out as quickly as possible because we do understand that, while we've invested in the system and while we've made it clean and while we've made it green, it needs to be as affordable as possible. That's why we're working very, very hard to ensure that we can get this done as quickly as possible, to do just that.

SENIOR CITIZENS

Ms. Daiene Vernile: My question is for the Minister of Seniors Affairs. The minister is now leading a new, full-fledged ministry which is dedicated to the well-being of Ontario's seniors, and it's reshaping how we view aging in Ontario. This decision shows the commitment that both the Premier and all our members are making to support older adults.

In my riding of Kitchener Centre, the head of a local retirement home told me recently that today's seniors want to be active and lead a life of purpose, regardless of their age. We have long-term-care facilities, community centres and educational programs designed especially with today's seniors in mind.

Minister, we know that you've been very busy working to transition to your new role, and you have some very interesting ideas on shaping this ministry.

Speaker, could the Minister of Seniors Affairs share with us some of her aspirations in this new, important role she has?

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I want to begin by thanking the member from Kitchener Centre for the question. I have to say that I'm truly honoured to be the Minister of Seniors Affairs.

I can't think of a better time than the year 2017 to create this stand-alone ministry, and that's because, as we all know, 2017 is that watershed year. This is the year when in Ontario there are more people over the age of 65 than children under the age of 15. There are 2.2 million seniors in Ontario, and I say that's 2.2 million very good reasons to create the stand-alone Ministry of Seniors Affairs.

Here in Ontario, we have a vision: We want to make Ontario the best place in the world to grow up and grow old in. I commit to giving life to that vision.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I want to thank the minister for her answer. It's very encouraging to hear that we are addressing the changing needs of seniors, and to see the transition to a full ministry. The minister has been documenting her activities on social media. This is a really good way for all of us to stay informed of her activities.

You've been out almost every day meeting with seniors and stakeholders, hearing their concerns and offering them support. This is a very important undertaking—listening—and it's no doubt greatly appreciated by the people with whom you have visited. It's important for all members to get out and to hear feedback from people who we are working to support.

Speaker, could the Minister of Seniors Affairs please tell us about her recent tour? She has been criss-crossing Ontario chatting with people and listening to them; I, for one, would like to hear what happened on this tour.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I want to again thank the member for the question. I'm really glad that my staff has been diligently posting my tour on social media.

This winter, I travelled across the province to meet with seniors face to face, because I wanted to hear from them first-hand what their concerns are. That's why I visited elderly persons' centres in Ancaster and Hamilton, met with seniors in Cobourg not once but twice, spoke with university students about tackling the challenges of an aging population at Trent University with Minister Leal, and listened to a diverse group of advocates in Etobicoke and Newmarket with MPP Milczyn and MPP Baker.

I was in northern Ontario with Minister Zimmer and met with the Naicatchewenin and Mitaanjigamiing First Nations, and I visited Sandy Lake to announce funding for a new elders' hub. But I'm not done, Mr. Speaker. I intend to continue touring the province.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is to the Minister of Energy. Last month, the Leader of the Opposition and I visited the Cedarvilla farm in Selwyn township in the riding of Peterborough, where we heard from local dairy farmer Randy Bullock that his hydro bill has tripled over the past 10 years. He still has the same number of cows that he did a decade ago, he has been improving the efficiency of his business and he even milks the cows by hand to save on hydro costs, but still those costs have skyrocketed, and the government's 8% rebate is nothing but a drop in the bucket.

The hard-working farmers across rural Ontario are tough and proud, but as Randy puts it, it is just too much.

My question to the Minister of Energy is, when will the Liberal government stop forcing agriculture, one of our main economic drivers, out of the province with their irresponsible hydro policies?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Minister of Agriculture.

1130

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the honourable lady from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock for her question this morning.

Just to give you a little insight, particularly in the dairy industry in the province of Ontario, over the last two years, the dairy industry quota in the province of Ontario has increased by 6% each and every year. What does that tell you, Mr. Speaker? That tells you—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Hon. Jeff Leal: —that the dairy sector is growing significantly in the province of Ontario. Agriculture and agri-food processing contributes $36 billion to Ontario's GDP each and every year.

Mr. Speaker, this morning, at 5:30 a.m.—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): To the end.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, at 5:30 a.m. this morning, 800,000 Ontarians woke up to pursue their careers in agriculture.

The honourable lady says that the quota increase has nothing to do with us. Yes, it has absolutely everything to do with us. We work with the dairy farmers each and every day—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I'd like to remind the minister that when I stand, you sit.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Yes, sir.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Laurie Scott: The cost to agriculture because of the rising costs of energy is real. You can't ignore that.

The government's response to the ongoing hydro crisis has been something to behold. For years, they denied there was a problem. Then, they blamed the problem on anyone else but themselves. Finally, they admitted that they are responsible for the hydro mess but offered Ontarians a weak and tone-deaf response. Ontarians saw through the government's actions and told them that they were doing far too little, far too late to respond to the growing energy poverty in the province.

Today, we hear that they're once again scrambling to try to buy back Ontarians' trust. But how can Ontarians trust this government to do anything to solve the mess that they themselves created over 14 years of mismanagement? Tell that to the dairy farmers.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Jeff Leal: Well, thanks very much, Madam Speaker. I just want to reply to the supplementary. The honourable member should know, of course, that the dairy quota in Ontario is worth about $6 billion, and it's growing each and every year. The party opposite, when we proposed a risk management program for everybody else outside of the supply management sector, didn't support it.

But in the back concessions in Ontario, we're hearing now that the Leader of the Opposition—

Interjections.

Hon. Jeff Leal: We're hearing in the back concessions in Ontario that the Leader of the Opposition may be endorsing Maxime Bernier as the next federal Conservative leader. Mr. Speaker, you know what mad Max wants to do? To get rid of supply management—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Oxford will withdraw.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings, come to order—second time.

The member from Oxford will withdraw.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Everybody just tone it down.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No comments.

New question.

MERCURY POISONING

Mr. Michael Mantha: Mr. Speaker, good morning to you. My question is to the Acting Premier. On February 13, your government released a statement that said that you are completely committed to identifying all contaminated sites and cleaning up the English-Wabigoon River of the mercury that has been poisoning the Grassy Narrows and Wabaseemoong First Nations for two generations.

Will the Acting Premier tell this Legislature and the people of this province exactly what promises the Premier made to Chief Fobister in a meeting held with him on February 10?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to thank the honourable member for the question on something that we both agree is a critical issue.

It is incredibly shocking to me that, from the 1960s on, this problem festered, to the degradation of the environment and, more importantly, in this case, of people's health.

We have invested over $300,000 now with the First Nation to do studies. We have now identified both an approach and remediation of the river. We are now moving to have Dr. Rudd finalize that work. We have identified the second source. We now have to figure out the nature of the source, whether it's groundwater or out of sediment, and then we have to start the engineering work.

We're going to be advancing additional funding—and I want to thank Dr. Rudd and his team, because after a lifetime, almost as long as I've been alive on this planet,

this problem has been neglected. I think all of us in this House wish we had behaved differently over the last 50 years. I don't think anyone has clean hands here.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Again to the Acting Premier: A report released yesterday, funded by this government, says there is "strong evidence" of an ongoing source of mercury contamination at the old mill site down the river of Grassy Narrows, yet this government has said repeatedly that the mill site is not an ongoing source of mercury.

Why has this government never bothered to test the river next to the Dryden mill?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: In fact, we tested the mill. We tested all the sites that Mr. Glowacki pointed out. Domtar has been required to monitor the wells and sites. No one could find this. We also invested—we're funding Dr. Rudd's work, and finally, on the fourth try, Dr. Rudd found it.

It is very difficult to find these things. The reason we know where the second source is is because this government has put hundreds of thousands of dollars into a crack science team to locate it.

All of us were in power during those periods of time, and not one party, when in power prior to this government, took action on that. Maybe we can all have a little humility. Hopefully, we'll get the engineering work, the water treatment facilities—and we'll get this fixed and restore some respect for the people who live there, which they are owed.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mrs. Cristina Martins: My question is for the Minister of Government and Consumer Services. I hear time and again from constituents in Davenport about commission-dependent salespeople aggressively pressuring residents into signing contracts for appliances, such as air conditioning units, water heaters and furnaces. The sales pitch often uses unclear contracts or misrepresentations by salespeople to convince residents to enter into contracts with exorbitant fees.

This aggressive door-to-door marketing tactic has been a long-standing consumer protection issue, as it is often the most vulnerable consumers who are targeted. Unfortunately it is often the socially isolated and less well-informed consumers who are particularly susceptible to this type of marketing.

This is especially true in my riding of Davenport, which is home to a large number of seniors and a large number of immigrants who do not have English as their first language and cannot communicate, read or write well in English.

Could the minister explain what measures our government has in place to protect our most vulnerable from being taken advantage of by these unfair marketing tactics?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank the member from Davenport for her important question and her strong work on behalf of her community. It's just incredible dedication. As the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, I am committed to protecting consumers in their homes from overly aggressive and deceptive business practices.

Currently, our Consumer Protection Act gives consumers special rights when entering contracts in their home. Consumers have the right to cancel contracts for any reason within a cooling-off period, as well as specific requirements for contracts to provide specific information. Otherwise, consumers can cancel them within a year of signing.

However, we know that there is more to be done to protect consumers and our most vulnerable members of society from being misled or taken advantage of. That's why we introduced Bill 59.

I'm happy to talk more about that in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I want to thank the minister for updating the House on what protections and rights consumers have when faced with door-to-door salespeople. I know Maria, who came into my office just over the winter break, is going to be very pleased to hear about the proposed legislation that would, if passed, offer even greater protections for consumers and new rules for sellers.

I am proud of our government for its long-standing history of putting consumers first. This government puts great efforts into developing new and effective ways of protecting vulnerable residents, and I'm pleased to know that the proposed additional legislation would create greater protections for consumers.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Could you provide more information about how this proposed legislation aims to strengthen consumer protection?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Again, thank you to the member, but I also want to give a shout-out to the MPP from Etobicoke–Lakeshore because he did fantastic work on this in terms of door-to-door sales and has helped make this bill very strong.

1140

The Putting Consumers First Act, if passed, would amend our Consumer Protection Act. Any contracts in violation of the act would be considered void, and any goods and services provided under these void contracts would be considered unsolicited, allowing the consumer to keep them without obligation. The legislation would also create consistent cooling-off periods as well as develop new rules about how these changes would be enforced.

It's important to protect consumers without penalizing organizations that do comply with the Consumer Protection Act, which is why we'll continue to monitor consumer complaints to consider other potential sectors affected by our legislation.

Again, I want to thank everyone who has worked tirelessly on this bill.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Speaker, we know that the effects of hydro prices on our rural communities are placing a strain on families and businesses. Unfortunately, this new reality of living in Ontario is now threatening our arenas and curling rinks as they become increasingly expensive to run.

In Bala, the arena has been the staple of the community and has seen generations of figure skaters and hockey and ringette players learn on its ice. The hydro bill for the facility has continued to rise and now comes in at about $50,000 per year. Combined with other maintenance costs, the municipality is seriously considering closing the arena.

Speaker, will the minister explain how he expects communities to keep their arenas open in Ontario with Ontario's outrageous electricity costs?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Again, I'll reiterate many of the things I've been saying today and for the last eight months, since I've been minister. We are continuing to find ways to put rates in a position of being lower, not only for ratepayers and families but, of course, for municipalities and for arenas.

Yesterday, I know that the MPP from Timiskaming–Cochrane talked about his curling rink. Many of us have these facilities in our ridings. It's very important for us—especially as this government, as we continue to invest in infrastructure and building Ontario up—that we continue to find ways to lower rates for those institutions, Mr. Speaker.

I used my example yesterday of the curling club in Greater Sudbury that was able to save thousands of dollars by actually utilizing the programs that we put in place to actually help them reduce their rates and bring their rates down. That's something—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Niagara West–Glanbrook, come to order.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker—in which they're able to lower their rates.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Norm Miller: Again to the Minister of Energy: Speaker, it's truly hard to believe that we're even having a conversation about how to save recreational facilities in our small communities. Like the Bala arena, the Huntsville Curling Club is a community staple. The club recently hosted their annual Family Day open house to allow young curlers to get introduced to a new sport. It's sad to say, however, that even if they really enjoyed it, the increasing costs to play has brought fears that this will be a barrier to new members. One third of the current membership fee already goes to keeping the lights on. The fact is, curling clubs don't have many tools to offset rapidly increasing hydro costs. As costs to play rise, organizers fear that membership numbers will continue to decline over time.

Speaker, would the minister please explain how hydro prices were allowed to get this out of control under his government's watch?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I know in most parts of the province the great work that our minister of tourism and sport is doing to encourage people to play sports, and curling is one of those sports, Mr. Speaker. We're seeing more and more people actually engaging in this sport. That's a great thing.

When it comes to making sure that we have this conversation, the one conversation that they overlook is that they actually left our system in a shambles. We actually had to build the system back up; $50 billion we had to spend, to invest in transmission and to invest in generation.

Now what do they want to do, Mr. Speaker? They want to rip up all of our renewable contracts and stop renewable energy in this province. That is not something that we, on this side of the House, agree with. That brought in billions in investment and created tens of thousands of jobs. We'll continue to invest in the province and in our recreation facilities.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Agriculture on a point of order.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I'd just like to correct my record. When I was answering the supplementary this morning, I inadvertently referred to you as Madam Speaker when I should have said "Mr. Speaker." I apologize.

VISITORS

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I would like to welcome to Queen's Park grade 10 students from St. Marcellinus Secondary School, which is located in my great riding of Mississauga–Brampton South. I look forward to meeting them after question period.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I just really wanted to welcome, from a school in my riding, the grade 5 class from Elizabeth Simcoe Junior Public School. I want to welcome them to Queen's Park.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I would like to correct my record. I inadvertently said it was the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore that worked on door-to-door sales. Of course, we all know that it was the MPP from Etobicoke Centre who did this fabulous work.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1146 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Michael Mantha: I just want to remind members that Ducks Unlimited are downstairs at the reception tonight, and the challenge is on for the DuckCup. The best MPP tweet wins the DuckCup. I'm the defending

champion for the last two years. It's up to you. Put out the tweet.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I wasn't quite sure if that was an introduction or a statement or a debate. I can't figure that one out.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Municipal support is building in my riding and across the province for a fairer system between municipalities and railroads. Municipalities believe the government should implement a new system of municipal property assessment for railroad right-of-way properties based on utilizing a per-ton-mile concept.

The town of Chisholm and the township of Bonfield—both in my riding—have submitted resolutions calling on the Minister of Finance to take action. The number of municipalities passing similar resolutions is growing. The resolutions call for revisions that would address what they describe as an inequity in property taxation on railroad right-of-ways collected by Ontario municipalities.

Municipalities have been asking the government for years to address this issue, but the government continues to ignore their requests. The government continues to show a lack of respect and willingness to co-operate with municipalities. They continue to make promises but don't deliver on the commitments that have been made, and this is one that can easily be addressed.

TOMMY SIMPSON AND LARRY COSTELLO

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I lost a couple of good buddies in recent weeks. Both were veterans of the Second World War and both were in the navy.

Tommy Simpson was 95. I met him about 40 years ago, when he was a border guard and president of their local union in Windsor. How well I remember him every Remembrance Day, on parade, laying a wreath and still wearing the uniform that he wore in World War II. He was a radar operator. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, one of only 114 given out for service in that war.

In later years, he organized and ran a number of sporting leagues for seniors. He was a hell of a dancer. He liked to have a drink. He was a bit of a rascal and a great friend. We'll miss his humour and his friendship.

Speaker, my other buddy was Larry Costello. He was 92. Larry was well known in military circles in the Windsor area. He had a chest full of ribbons—service and Legion. He was the official custodian of our downtown cenotaph and a strong voice for all veterans.

Larry lied about his age and signed up for service when he was just 16. He spent 25 years in the navy. He was a long-time volunteer at our downtown mission and at the Windsor Historical Society. He was instrumental in the Veterans Memories Project.

Larry didn't drink and, despite his many years in the navy, he still couldn't swim a stroke.

We're all going to miss Larry. Condolences to Goldie and the family from all of us here at Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A nice tribute, with a little dash of unparliamentary language.

ARIE NERMAN

Mr. Arthur Potts: I rise today to remember and salute Arie Nerman, a long-time resident and community leader in Beaches–East York. He died last week, and I was honoured to attend his memorial at the Beach Synagogue.

Arie was the heart and soul of the Beach Hebrew Institute, and he'd been part of the institute for over 40 years. That commitment was recognized a few years ago by naming the downstairs of the synagogue the Arie Nerman Social Hall.

The Beach Hebrew Institute is one of the true hidden gems of Toronto. Many Beachers may be unaware that the institute exists, yet it has been part of the fabric since 1920. In its early years, it endured periods of anti-Semitism, particularly during the 1930s, and for many years during and after the Second World War, they chose to keep a low profile. But the resilience of its members, and the work of men and women like Arie, helped the institute preserve and thrive.

He played a key role in bringing the institute to the attention of the broader Beach community. He was a founder of the Beach interfaith community outreach group, which included representatives from Presbyterian, Anglican, United, Roman Catholic, Mennonite and Baptist churches and whose primary initiative was a drop-in program for the less fortunate. He was a leader whose actions reinforced a spirit of inclusiveness and mutual respect through interfaith engagement.

He was recognized for his commitment to the community by being named Beach citizen of the year twice, in 2005 and 2013, and he also was awarded the Queen's jubilee medal.

In times like these, it's important to recognize, celebrate and emulate great, valuable people like Arie Nerman. By all accounts, he embodied what it means to embrace and build an inclusive and engaged society.

I wish I'd had the opportunity to spend more time with him. It was a real pleasure, and I'm pleased to be able to share his story with you and with all of Ontario today. May he rest in peace.

LARRY GARRETT

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's an honour to stand in the House today to recognize a very important anniversary that just passed. On February 20 of this year, Mr. Larry Garrett of Petrolia, Ontario, officially began his 50th year

of employment with the town of Petrolia. Today Mr. Garrett serves the residents of the town of Petrolia as a public works foreman.

As a resident of Petrolia myself, and someone who has known Larry for many years, I would like to say how lucky we are in Petrolia to have such a long-standing, knowledgeable employee of the town.

Despite long since earning the chance to kick off his work boots, Larry refuses to slow down. In fact, Mr. Garrett was hard at work this week, on behalf of the town of Petrolia, just a few blocks from here at the Ontario Good Roads Association conference.

I want to join all of my colleagues at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and the residents of the town of Petrolia in congratulating Mr. Larry Garrett on his impressive accomplishment, and thank him for his many years of service.

There's no doubt in my mind that Mr. Garrett's contributions are a major reason why Petrolia, Ontario, has come to be known as "The Greatest Town on Earth." Thank you, Larry. Here's to the next 50.

NORTHERN TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Michael Mantha: I rise on behalf of the good people of Algoma–Manitoulin who once again were suffering and were affected by road closures in my riding. Again, a couple of weeks ago, Highway 17—our Trans-Canada Highway, the artery across this country—was shut down for an extended period of time. That happens repeatedly and too many times.

People don't have any options, like in the small community of Dubreuilville, where, if that road shuts down, they are isolated. They can't get to, can't get from; they can't get their kids to school; they can't get to doctors' appointments. This is happening across northern Ontario, not just in my riding.

Just as an example, the report of the Northern and Eastern Ontario Rail Network highlighted some of these issues that have happened. Highway 11, on November 24, was shut down for 24 hours. Highway 17 was closed repeatedly over a four-day period because of snowstorms. Shutdowns on 16 separate occasions just had happened.

The answer to this is looking at secondary routes and looking at emergency routes, but let's make sure that rail is part of that discussion. This government has shut down rail in northern Ontario. If we are going to diversify and look at real transportation and providing the economies and getting our people to and from and getting the product to flow across this country, rail has to be part of that discussion.

BLOOD DONATION

Mr. John Fraser: Tomorrow, Thursday, March 2, Canadian Blood Services is holding a blood donor clinic at the Mosque of Mercy in my riding of Ottawa South.

Speaker, there is an increased need now for blood donations to replenish blood supplies, as winter weather often disrupts blood donor collections across the country. Half of Canadians will need blood, or know someone who will need blood, at some point in their lives, yet only 4% of us donate blood.

Blood donations are a critical part of everyday medical care that is used in major surgeries, medical procedures, cancer treatment and managing disease. Less than an hour of your time can make an incredible difference in a person's life.

I encourage everyone in Ottawa South to drop by the Mosque of Mercy on Hunt Club Road tomorrow between 12:30 and 3:30, or 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., to donate.

I'll be here in Toronto tomorrow, because I have to be here for debate, so I'm sorry that I can't be there. But I want to thank the Mosque of Mercy and Canadian Blood Services volunteers for hosting the blood donor clinic. It's something they do five times a year. As neighbours and community members, it's important to look after each other and our needs, and donating blood is a way of doing that.

1510

WALK FOR HOMELESSNESS

Mr. John Yakabuski: This past Saturday, I was thrilled to join over 300 walkers and volunteers for the opening of Renfrew's county Coldest Night of the Year walk for homelessness in Pembroke. Forty-two teams assembled at the Legion before heading out to raise funds for homelessness in Renfrew County. It was truly gratifying to see and feel the enthusiasm among the people as they got ready to hit the streets.

When organizers joined the national campaign, they set a goal of $40,000. Of the 115 communities participating countrywide, Renfrew county was the first to reach its goal. The announced total was a whopping $68,449, which didn't take into account monies raised that day. Committee chair Dave Studham stated that they were the first to reach their goal, beating out Montreal, Ottawa, Edmonton and Calgary.

Congratulations to chair Studham and his entire team of volunteers. I particularly want to mention OPP officer Jerry Novack, who has been a driving force in supporting youth and the homeless in Renfrew county. I also want to thank Jimmy Lapointe of Petawawa Toyota for giving the campaign a real boost by making a $6,000 donation.

The funds will go to The Grind Emergency Refuge and the Renfrew County Safe Shelter for Youth. The Safe Shelter for Youth assists young people aged 16 to 21 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The Grind Emergency Refuge is a three-bed shelter that provides temporary accommodation to assist adults who are homeless or who are at risk of homelessness.

Of course, the biggest thank you goes to those people who walked and/or sponsored walkers to raise this amazing total. The one thing that never shocks me is the size of the hearts of the people in my communities. They have once again shown that with their amazing generosity.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

Mr. Joe Dickson: Virtually everyone in this House annually honours all places of worship, including Tamil, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish and Ismaili observances, just to name a few, including ceremonies of Thai Pongal; Ramadan; Eid Ul-Fitr, the end of Ramadan time fasting for Muslims; Holi and Diwali; and Yom Kippur, Passover and Rosh Hashanah.

Christians will celebrate Easter season, the faithful observance which is celebrated worldwide by almost 2.2 billion Christians. This religious observance is preceded by Lent, which began today on Ash Wednesday, for a period of six weeks, leading up to Easter. I attended Ash Wednesday service today, and you may have noticed the black ashes on my forehead.

April 14 marks Good Friday and commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and his death at Calvary, with Mother Mary at his feet as he died. Good Friday represents the sacrifices and suffering in Jesus's life and the selfless acts from a man free from sin to save sinners. They placed a crown of thorns on his head, causing further pain and also piercing his side with a lance, ensuring his death.

The crucifixion was the culmination of a number of events in Holy Week, including the resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday, April 16, two days following the crucifixion, and his ascension into heaven 40 days later.

Easter Sunday is the celebration of our Lord rising from the dead and proving, once and for all, that he is the son of God.

Holy Week, including the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, is observed by Christians, and Catholics in Ontario alone will be praying in some 30 languages at Easter.

BUSINESS AWARDS

Mr. Jim McDonell: Businesses and entrepreneurs are the lifeblood of a thriving economy, and in Cornwall and the counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry, we know how to celebrate their achievements. This past Saturday, the Cornwall and Area Chamber of Commerce hosted its annual Business Excellence Awards Banquet.

The winners in each category were as follows: Business of the Year went to Laminacorr, under president Guy Robichaud; Small Business of the Year went to Rurban Brewery and the owners, Andy and Karen Rorabeck; Entrepreneur of the Year went to Josh Casselman, the owner of Kings and Little Ones; Ambassador of the Year for raising Cornwall's profile went to Lars Ove-Harraldson; the Tourism Excellence award went to the annual Apples and Art Studio Tour; Economic Impact went to Morbern Industries; the Above and Beyond award went to the hidden secret of the area, the NAV Centre; and the Breakthrough award went to the Shorty Jenkins Classic Curling Competition.

The two major awards: Lifetime Achievement of the Year, for long-term success, community involvement and being a role model, went to Tom and Bill Kaneb. In addition to their very successful businesses and providing employment to generations of local residents, they have always dedicated their time and resources to benefit Cornwall and area. The Citizen of the Year was awarded to a very deserving Dr. Rachel Navaneelan. She started out with a small backyard fundraiser and it has evolved into a passion that has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars that benefits young children locally and around the world.

On behalf of the residents of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, well done.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs concerning energy rates. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bills without amendment:

Bill Pr56, An Act to revive 2053266 Ontario Inc.

Bill Pr57, An Act to revive Prosper Legal Management Inc.

Bill Pr58, An Act to revive 1049491 Ontario Inc.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed. Carried.

Report adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CHOICE FOR PATIENTS SEEKING ADDICTION TREATMENT ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 CONCERNANT LES CHOIX QUI S'OFFRENT AUX PATIENTS À LA RECHERCHE D'UN TRAITEMENT DE LA TOXICOMANIE

Ms. Jones moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 99, An Act to amend the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Act with respect to residential substance

abuse treatment services / Projet de loi 99, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le ministère de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée en ce qui a trait aux services de traitement de la toxicomanie en établissement.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: The bill would amend the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Act to require persons who operate a centre or a program that provides residential substance abuse treatment services to provide certain information to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and requiring the minister to publish that information.

Basically, I just want it available to everyone.

PETITIONS

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontarians rely on ServiceOntario locations to access public services such as health cards, vital statistics and land registry services;

"Whereas many Ontarians in rural areas are unable to drive long distances to an alternative ServiceOntario location;

"Whereas the duty of government is to provide and preserve its ability to provide services to the public;

"Whereas the planned closure of nine ServiceOntario locations, including Morrisburg, is an affront to Ontarians' right to receive the public services they helped build with their hard-earned tax dollars;

"Whereas the displacement of land registry offices will create additional costs to the public as legal professionals and municipal officials will need to travel outside their municipality;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To halt the closure of nine public ServiceOntario locations, including Morrisburg, unless the continued local in-person delivery of ServiceOntario services in those communities can be guaranteed."

I agree with this petition and I've affixed my signature to it.

1520

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. Michael Mantha: "Whereas a growing number of Ontarians are concerned about the growth in low-wage, part-time, casual, temporary and insecure employment; and

"Whereas too many workers are not protected by the minimum standards outlined in existing employment and labour laws; and

"Whereas the Ontario government is currently engaging in a public consultation to review and improve employment and labour laws in the province;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to implement a decent work agenda by making sure that Ontario's labour and employment laws:

"—require all workers be entitled to a starting wage that reflects a uniform, provincial minimum, regardless of a worker's age, job or sector of employment;

"—promote full-time, permanent work with adequate hours for all those who choose it;

"—ensure part-time, temporary, casual and contract workers receive the same pay and benefits as their full-time, permanent counterparts;

"—provide at least seven (7) days of paid sick leave each year;

"—support job security for workers when companies or contracts change ownership;

"—prevent employers from downloading their responsibilities for minimum standards onto temp agencies, subcontractors or workers themselves;

"—extend minimum protections to all workers by eliminating exemptions to the laws;

"—protect workers who stand up for their rights;

"—offer proactive enforcement of laws, supported by adequate public staffing and meaningful penalties for employers who violate the law;

"—make it easier for workers to join unions; and

"—ensure all workers are paid at least $15 an hour."

I wholeheartedly support this petition and present it to page Ismael to bring down to the Clerks' table.

NANJING MASSACRE

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly:

"Whereas the events in Asian countries during World War II are not well-known;

"Whereas Ontarians have not had an opportunity for a thorough discussion and examination of the World War II atrocities in Asia;

"Whereas Ontarians are unfamiliar with the World War II atrocities in Asia;

"Whereas Ontario is recognized as an inclusive society;

"Whereas Ontario is the home to one of the largest Asian populations in Canada, with over 2.6 million in 2011;

"Whereas some Ontarians have direct relationships with victims and survivors of the Nanjing Massacre, whose stories are untold;

"Whereas the Nanjing Massacre was an atrocity with over 200,000 Chinese civilians and soldiers alike were indiscriminately killed, and tens of thousands of women

were sexually assaulted, in the Japanese capture of the city;

"Whereas December 13, 2017, marks the 80th anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre;

"Whereas designating December 13th in each year as the Nanjing Massacre Commemorative Day in Ontario will provide an opportunity for all Ontarians, especially the Asian community, to gather, remember, and honour the victims and families affected by the Nanjing Massacre;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislature pass the Nanjing Massacre Commemorative Day Act, 2016 by December 8, 2017, to coincide with the 80th anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre, which will enable Ontarians, especially those with Asian heritage, to plan commemorative activities to honour the victims and families affected by the Nanjing Massacre."

I will give my petition to McGowan and I want to thank all those who signed—almost 3,500, Mr. Speaker.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly—actually I have hundreds here; I've read them before.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas a staff report has recommended Upper Canada District School Board close numerous schools across eastern Ontario; and

"Whereas access to quality local education is essential for rural communities to thrive; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Education removed community impact considerations from pupil accommodation review guidelines in 2015; and

"Whereas local communities treasure their public schools and have been active participants in their continued operation, maintenance and success; and

"Whereas the Ontario government should focus on delivering quality, local education services to all communities, including rural Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) To reinstate considerations of value to the local community and value to the local economy in pupil accommodation review guidelines; and

"(2) To work with all school boards, including Upper Canada District School Board, to modify the funding model to include appropriate funding that considers rural education opportunities, student busing times, accessible extracurricular and inter-school activities, the school's role as a community hub, and its value to the local economy."

I agree with this, and will be passing it off to page Jack.

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I have a petition for a universal high-quality child care system in Ontario, and I'd like to thank Margaret Villamizar from Windsor for signing the petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 commits Ontario to 'a system of responsive, safe, high-quality and accessible child care and early years programs and services that will support parents and families, and will contribute to the healthy development of children';

"Whereas recent community opposition to Ontario's child care regulation proposals indicates that a new direction for child care is necessary to address issues of access, quality, funding, system building, planning and workforce development;

"Whereas Ontario's Gender Wage Gap Strategy consultation found 'child care was the number one issue everywhere' and 'participants called for public funding and support that provides both adequate wages and affordable fees';

"Whereas the federal government's commitment to a National Early Learning and Child Care Framework provides an excellent opportunity for Ontario to take leadership and work collaboratively to move forward on developing a universal, high-quality, comprehensive child care system in Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To undertake a transparent policy process with the clear goal of developing a universal early childhood education and child care system where all families can access quality child care programs; and

"To publicly declare their commitment to take leadership in developing a national child care plan with the federal government that adopts the principles of universality, high-quality and comprehensiveness."

I fully support this petition. I will give it to page Nolan to send to the Clerks' desk.

DENTAL CARE

Mr. James J. Bradley: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas lack of access to dental care affects overall health and well-being, and poor oral health is linked to diabetes, cardiovascular, respiratory disease, and Alzheimer's disease; and

"Whereas it is estimated that two to three million people in Ontario have not seen a dentist in the past year, mainly due to the cost of private dental services; and

"Whereas approximately every nine minutes a person in Ontario arrives at a hospital emergency room with a dental problem but can only get painkillers and antibiotics, and this costs the health care system at least $31 million annually with no treatment of the problem;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest in public oral health programs for low-income adults and seniors by:

"—ensuring that plans to reform the health care system include oral health so that vulnerable people in our communities have equitable access to the dental care they need to be healthy;

"—extending public dental programs for low-income children and youth within the next two years to include low-income adults and seniors; and

"—delivering public dental services in a cost-efficient way through publicly funded dental clinics such as public health units, community health centres and aboriginal health access centres to ensure primary oral health services are accessible to vulnerable people in Ontario."

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

"Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve."

Of course, I agree, and I affix my signature.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Mr. Michael Mantha: Having met with the Sault Ste. Marie and the Sudbury-Manitoulin Alzheimer's societies, it's appropriate to introduce this this afternoon.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease is a degenerative brain disease that causes thinking and memory impairment. Alzheimer's disease is progressive, worsens over time and will eventually lead to death;

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"Whereas there are an estimated 208,000 Ontarians diagnosed with Alzheimer's and related dementia today, and that number is set to increase by 40% in the next 10 years;

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease creates emotional, social and economic burdens on the family and supports of those suffering with the disease—over 25% of those providing personal supports to survivors of Alzheimer's disease and related dementia are seniors;

"Whereas the total economic burden of dementia in Ontario is expected to increase by more than $770 million per year through to 2020; and

"Whereas Ontario's strategy for Alzheimer's disease and related dementia has not been revised since the implementation of a five-year strategy in 1999;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to immediately review, revise and implement an updated, research-informed, comprehensive strategy to respond to and prepare for the rapidly growing needs of those living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia."

I completely agree with this petition and present it to Benjamin to bring down to the Clerks' table.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. James J. Bradley: It's a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas payday loans are the most expensive source of credit in Canada and can create the risk of an additional financial burden for the 3% of Ontario households that borrow payday loans; and

"Whereas in Ontario a two-week payday loan carries an annualized interest rate of approximately 547.5%; and

"Whereas these loans are typically marketed to financially vulnerable consumers;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Mandate the Ontario government incrementally reduce the cost of borrowing a payday loan, first to $18 per $100 advanced in 2017 and then to $15 per $100 advanced in 2018."

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Victor Fedeli: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas in Ontario there is a shortage of housing for adults with developmental disabilities;

"Whereas in locations across Ontario there are long lists of individuals waiting for housing. Due to the lack of residential supports compared to the ever-growing list of adults with developmental disabilities waiting to access the housing units available, the wait time for these individuals can be months or even years long;

"Whereas Ontario requires more housing spaces for this section of vulnerable individuals so they can take the steps necessary to realize their full potential;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To take immediate action to address the housing situation for adults with developmental disabilities."

I agree with this petition, sign it and turn it over to page McGowan.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas under the current Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG), one in eight Ontario schools is at risk of closure; and

"Whereas the value of a school to the local economy and community has been removed from the PARG; and

"Whereas the PARG outlines consultation requirements that are insufficient to allow for meaningful community involvement, including the establishment of community hubs; and

"Whereas school closures have a significant negative impact on families and their children, resulting in inequitable access to extracurricular activities and other essential school involvement, and after-school work opportunities; and

"Whereas school closures have devastating impacts on the growth and overall viability of communities across Ontario, in particular self-sustaining agricultural communities;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"To place an immediate moratorium on all school closures across Ontario and to suspend all pupil accommodation reviews until the PARG has been subject to a substantive review by an all-party committee that will examine the effects of extensive school closures on the health of our communities and children."

I fully support this, will sign it and send it to the table with page Nolan.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The time for petitions is over.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I move that, pursuant to standing order 47 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 92, An Act to amend the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2014, and make related amendments to other statutes, when the bill is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment, and at such time the bill shall be ordered referred to the Standing Committee on General Government; and

That the Standing Committee on General Government be authorized to meet on Wednesday, March 8, 2017, from 4 to 6 p.m. and on Thursday, March 9, 2017, from 2 to 5 p.m. for the purpose of public hearings on the bill; and

That the Clerk of the Committee, in consultation with the committee Chair, be authorized to arrange the following with regard to Bill 92:

—notice of public hearings on the Ontario parliamentary channel, the Legislative Assembly's website and Canada NewsWire; and

—that the deadline for requests to appear on Wednesday, March 8, 2017, be 10 a.m. on that same day; and

—that the deadline for requests to appear on Thursday, March 9, 2017, be 10 a.m. on that same day; and

—that witnesses be scheduled to appear before the committee on a first come, first served basis; and

—that each witness will receive up to five minutes for their presentation, followed by nine minutes for questions from committee members; and

—that the deadline for written submissions be 5 p.m. on Thursday, March 9, 2017; and

That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the Clerk of the Committee shall be 12 noon on Monday, March 13, 2017; and

That the committee be authorized to meet on Monday, March 20, 2017, from 2 to 6 p.m. for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill; and

That on Monday, March 20, 2017, at 4 p.m., those amendments which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the Committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto. At this time, the Chair shall allow one 20-minute waiting period pursuant to standing order 129(a); and

That the committee shall report the bill to the House no later than Tuesday, March 21, 2017; and

That, in the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

That, upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on General Government, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called that same day; and

That, when the order for third reading of the bill is called, one hour of debate shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, apportioned equally among the recognized parties. At the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

The votes on second and third reading may be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Mr. Naqvi has moved government motion number 7. Mr. Naqvi. Oh, it's the member for Durham.

Mr. Granville Anderson: Thank you, Speaker. I am happy to be here today to support the proposed amendments to the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act. Ontario's School Boards Collective Bargaining Act came

into force in 2014, putting into place a new, two-tiered bargaining framework that succeeded in achieving nine central agreements with Ontario teachers and educational workers for 2014-17. With the 2014-17 agreements set to expire this summer, we entered into discussions with our partners to build upon the gains we have made in Ontario's publicly funded education system and to continue to give students the best educational experience possible.

Working with our partner trustee associations, we are pleased to have reached tentative two-year agreements for 2017-19 with all of Ontario's teacher and education worker unions, Mr. Speaker. However, these extension agreements are conditional on the passage of the proposed amendments to the SBCBA. If ratified and approved, these agreements will ensure that Ontario's students continue to benefit from one of the world's best publicly funded education systems.

Our goal with respect to any collective agreement remains to promote stability in the sector, be consistent with our fiscal plan, and achieve positive results for students and those who work in the educational system.

Following the first round of bargaining, our government committed to reviewing the legislation. If passed, the proposed amendments would build on an already successful model for collective bargaining in Ontario's educational sector, with enhancements to flexibility, transparency and consistency.

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These amendments are informed by extensive consultations with our bargaining partners over the past year and recommendations from the Auditor General. Further, they are guided by our focus on promoting student achievement and well-being, maintaining public confidence in our publicly funded education system, and continuing to foster positive, constructive relations with our partners.

Why is the bill important, Mr. Speaker? This piece of legislation is one more example of our commitment to working with our educational partners to continue to give students the best educational experience possible. Teachers need to know that there is a flexible, transparent and consistent process in place to guide bargaining discussions and achieve collaborative and productive results for students and for those who work in the system. By passing this piece of legislation, we can increase the already strong public confidence in our publicly funded education system and continue to foster positive, constructive relations with our partners.

The intent of the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act is to give all parties a clear understanding of their respective roles during negotiations and a defined framework in which bargaining can take place so that all parties can focus their attention on achieving negotiated agreements that support student success and well-being.

Why are we proposing amendments to the SBCBA now? We committed to our labour partners, including teachers' federations, education workers, unions and trustee associations, that our government would move quickly, as the tentative two-year extension agreements we have achieved are conditional on these amendments. Further, if any of the tentative agreements are not ratified or approved, collective bargaining may start this year. As such, it is important that any amendments to the SBCBA are in place before the next round of bargaining, if need be.

I am glad we have all agreed to the stability in the education sector and how important that is to our school system. As we have heard during debate, everyone in this House recognizes that labour disruptions can be difficult for students, their families and workers in the sector. That's why we're proposing amendments that would build on the already successful model of collective bargaining in Ontario's education sector.

Passing this bill is an important step in that direction. We are now acting expeditiously to pass amendments to the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2017, which this House has debated for almost seven hours already. Mr. Speaker, it's important that we move forward with Bill 92 and bring it before the committee.

I cannot stress enough that all parties have expressed their desire to make the SBCBA work. The first round of bargaining under the SBCBA laid a strong foundation and framework for future rounds of negotiations and focusing on what worked and what could work better in the future. We have extensively consulted with our partners over the past year, and the amendments we are now proposing are a direct reflection of their input. Of course, we must acknowledge and respect the fact that some of the proposed amendments will require continued engagement of our partners, but there's no question that each of these amendments, which will collectively serve to refine the legislation, are needed to ensure a flexible, transparent and consistent process going forward.

Why should we speed things up, Mr. Speaker? It is now time to move this legislation forward in a timely manner. We owe it to our teachers, our students and their parents. It is time that we end second reading and refer the bill to committee. In committee, of course, stakeholders will present their views. We will be able to hear directly from teachers and parents their thoughts on this bill. Committee members will have an opportunity to move amendments to the bill as well.

I am looking forward to the support of all the members of this House on this very important piece of legislation so that the House can move to a substantive debate on other very important matters. There are a number of important pieces of legislation that have to be introduced and debated that we would like to have a chance to debate in this House and move through the legislative process. Other important pieces of legislation need to go through the legislative process before the end of the session. That is why I have moved this motion. I urge all members to support this motion.

Bill 92 is a very important piece of legislation. As my colleague from Whitby–Oshawa said, making sure that the very best conditions are in place to support the students across this province is paramount. I should thank my colleague for his support and thoughtful consideration of this bill.

If passed, these proposed amendments will strengthen our made-in-Ontario approach to bargaining in the education sector. Specifically, they will make improvements to the flexibility, transparency and consistency of the process. We owe it to those who ultimately benefit from improving the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act: Ontario's two million students and their families, all of whom rely on a strong, stable and sustainable publicly funded education system each and every day.

Speaker, I end my debate and now urge all members of the House to support this motion. I've listened to almost seven hours of debate. Believe it; it's the first time I've actually sat in this House for seven hours through any debating process, because of the importance of this bill to our students, their families and our teachers.

Most teachers I have spoken with in my riding support this bill. They want the stability, they want the continuity and they want the certainty. They just want to teach our children and make sure they have the best possible opportunity to learn and succeed. That's the reason why I am fully and wholeheartedly supporting this bill.

I would like to conclude by quoting my neighbour once more, the member from Whitby–Oshawa: "The bottom line of all of this particular process is making sure that the very best conditions are in place to support the students" across this province. Mr. Speaker, I could not have said that any better. Thank you to the member from Whitby–Oshawa.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I appreciate very much the opportunity to rise in the House today to speak to Bill 92, an act to amend the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, and the government's time allocation motion. I do so in my capacity as the associate critic for education and the official opposition critic for post-secondary education.

When I last spoke to this bill, I said that we look forward to giving this bill the same level of scrutiny as we would any bill, but today this government has decided to move time allocation on this important bill. This is absolutely shameful, and indicative of how this government respects the business of this House and even the House itself.

We have seen over the course of this government's tenure how often they have opted to use time allocation to stifle debate and push through their agenda. Yes, Speaker, we face a dangerous precedent—a dangerous precedent being set with today's motion. It's been less than two weeks since the House has returned from break, and the government is already motioning to close debate on a significant piece of legislation impacting so many Ontario residents, especially teachers and students. I'm extremely concerned that this government will begin to treat motions for time allocation as the standard process for how we create laws in this province.

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The Legislature has developed a system where legislation is introduced, debated, sent to standing committee for recommendations and voted on by the members of this House. It's a process that benefits the people of Ontario by allowing for a thoughtful discussion amongst all members to ensure that any bill that passes through these walls is the best version of itself, and it's a process that this government doesn't clearly respect, as witnessed by the motion before us today.

Speaker, you'd be interested to know that there's also a history of current members of this government taking issue with motions for time allocation while they were in opposition. For example the member of provincial Parliament for St. Catharines and the chief government whip, who's had a long, distinguished career, said in opposition: "Each of the time allocation motions which close off or choke off debate in this House seems to be more drastic as it comes forward, seems to be more sinister as it relates to the privileges of members of this House and as it relates to healthy, democratic debate for the people of this province."

This feeling is not unique to that member. The member for Eglinton–Lawrence once had this to say about time allocation: "That's what this government is doing. It's saying, 'We got elected. We are now going to rule by edict. We're going to rule by closing down debate. We're going to cut off debate....' That's the type of thing people are getting pretty fed up with.'" And they are, Speaker; they are.

We'd be interested in hearing those members' comments regarding the time allocation motion today. One can only wonder what happened to this government. They appeared to have such a strong moral compass in opposition, but have clearly lost their direction upon becoming the government of this province. Yet, after 13 years of Liberal government, over a decade of Liberal scandals, waste and mismanagement, residents in Ontario now know that there's a complete lack of moral authority for this government. Ontarians can no longer trust this government, and the people of this province know that Liberals only care about their own political survival.

But Speaker, we feel that we should ask this government, "Why move for time allocation on this particular bill?" This bill is the result of a process that began 13 years ago. The government neglected to put together a bill for 10 years before finally assembling the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2014, and a further three years, Speaker, before attempting to fix it with Bill 92. Now, all of a sudden, this bill is a pressing priority for the government? Speaker, I simply don't buy it.

Let's again take a closer look at the bill. While we're concerned about some aspects of the bill, there are also important measures in this bill that we support, but members of this House deserve ample time to discuss all amendments contained in this important bill.

As I stated earlier this week when I spoke to Bill 92, there are amendments we believe would have a positive impact on the education system. First, this bill allows the Minister of Education to extend the duration of current collective agreements by a period of two, four or five years. Now, some teachers in my riding that I've spoken with feel that negotiations between their bargaining unit

and the government happen too frequently. Teachers go to our schools every day to enrich the learning process of our students. That is their passion and the reason that they decided to go into teaching. They should be able to focus on teaching their students rather than worrying about what is being discussed at the negotiation table.

Second, there's also an amendment in this bill to add an additional five days' notice of any change of a strike or lockout that would result in a complete withdrawal of instruction or services. This measure would alleviate a great deal of stress on parents if a strike were to occur, allowing them over a week to put together a plan for their child's inability to attend school.

Lastly, there are amendments in this bill that increase the levels of accountability in our education system which are long overdue, for example, requiring school boards to provide updates on the progress of local bargaining, and adding individuals on trustees' associations to the provincial sunshine list, enhancing transparency and accountability. In addition, trustees would also be required to report their use of public funds received from the Ministry of Education.

Of course, Speaker, we agree with these amendments, and are looking forward to improving the rest of the bill in standing committee. However, we're concerned about some implications that arise from this bill when coupled with the former Minister of Education's statements on their net-zero approach to bargaining—net-zero approach. On Monday, I discussed that this approach almost certainly means cuts, and we believe that cuts are unacceptable, particularly in the areas of anti-bullying measures, the school repair funding program or our special-needs students.

In closing, I'd like to say again that this bill has a personal significance to me; I shared that when I first spoke about it earlier this week. This is not only due to my role as the critic for post-secondary education and associate critic for education, but also because my daughter is an early childhood educator, and has been for quite some time, with the Durham Catholic District School Board. She and every other teacher, student and parent in this province deserve to have all bills—all bills—related to education receive robust scrutiny, so that any proposed changes to the education system are as seamless as possible and focus on enriching our students' learning process.

Imagine, Speaker, if a teacher and their students were in class and walking through a lesson plan, and before completing the lesson and learning everything required to take the upcoming tests, one of them stood up and said, "We're taking the test now. No discussion, no debate." And yet, the situation I just described is not too dissimilar to what is happening today with this government's time allocation motion. That is why we urge the government to refrain from using time allocations moving forward. Hard-working Ontario families deserve a legislative process that benefits them, not the government.

As John F. Kennedy, the late American president, said, "Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone...." Speaker, it is the benefit of residents in Ontario that we have in this House, and should have, the best interests of.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Todd Smith): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am glad to be able to bring my voice, and the voices of my fellow teachers and my constituents, to the Legislature today to be able to speak about Bill 92, the amendment to the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, and also to speak to this time allocation motion which—surprise, surprise—we find ourselves discussing.

Speaker, I have all sorts of thoughts when it comes to the state of our education system. I'd like to preface this by saying that I think I would fight to the death for a strong public education system. That is what we build our whole society on; I really believe that. We can debate and split hairs over what we hope it will accomplish, but I think everybody in the province wants a strong public education system that allows children to reach their full potential. All children, from every and any background, should have access to a strong public education system that allows them to reach that potential, to feel safe and supported as they learn and as they grow.

So here we are discussing this bill, and I'd like to give full and total credit where credit is due to my colleague the member from London West, who spoke the other day and gave us a full history of how we got to this point, who walked us through different pieces of legislation and decision-making through the years to get us to this point. I'm not going to walk us through that same story, but I am going to highlight some of those pieces that get us to where we are today, which is with a bill in front of us that, fundamentally and essentially, allows contract extensions. Those contract extensions, up until this bill, were not allowed. Now they would be, with the agreement of both parties. If they want to be able to extend a contract that works for them, they will now have the opportunity and be able to add that into bargaining as well. They can extend the contract, but they can also bargain to extend future contracts. That's all well and good.

1600

There are some additional pieces that this legislation is throwing in there just for fun, and those are the contentious bits. Those are the pieces that we hear are being called "anti-democratic" by some of our partners, that we are hearing are disappointing because they don't factor in the recommendations and don't reflect the conversations and, as I said, the recommendations that were put to them. Anyway, here we are.

This piece of changing legislation that allows contract extensions came to be because, as the member from London West said, many years—well, I guess not that many years ago. Way, way back, many centuries ago, we had free and open collective bargaining. It unfolded, and we could discuss where it went well and where it didn't.

But a couple of years back, the government invited different players from the education community to meet at a central table and work some things out—central issues. Apparently, back then, it went well. It was voluntary. It was cordial, it sounds like.

But then all of that changed, because after that, it was the PDT, which is the provincial discussion table. In 2008, during that round of bargaining, the provincial discussion tables were created. The government was now the facilitator. It was still voluntary, but it didn't go smoothly; it didn't go well. It was a little more "thou shalt" at that table. We had some of those partners leave the table. So it didn't go as smoothly as they wanted.

Then, flash forward to 2012, when bargaining broke down. You may remember, Mr. Speaker, a little bill called Bill 115. That had a really, really pretty ribbon that they tied around it, labelling it the Putting Students First Act. It was a great, great title, and had quite an impact, as you may recall.

Bill 115 happened, and, as I mentioned the other day, at that time I was a teacher in a classroom. I used to sit in my backyard with my neighbour, and we would lament all of the ills of the world. We would sit back there and realize that we were having—the government was kicking us in the teeth as teachers. They were targeting collective bargaining, sick days, all of these pieces. They came at teachers in Ontario. At that time—actually, let's go back to Bill 115. Bill 115, the original act, before it went before the courts, was not allowed to be reviewed by the courts. It clearly stated that nothing set out in the bill could be "questioned or reviewed in any court," that no court could "question, review, prohibit or restrain" any part of the act. Essentially, it was above the law. The OLRB was not allowed to inquire into or decide on whether anything in Bill 115 was constitutionally valid or in line with the Human Rights Code—not cool at all, by the way. It did not permit free contract negotiations or collective bargaining. It was dictatorial, it was wrong, and the pushback was swift and fierce. Teachers and partners were saying that it was unconstitutional. And then guess what? It turned out that it was. That's flashing forward—it was challenged in court.

Then, on April 20, 2016, the Ontario Superior Court of Justice found that "between the fall of 2011 and the passage of the Putting Students First Act, Ontario infringed on the applicants' right, under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, to meaningful collective bargaining."

That was no surprise to anyone who had been involved in the process, Mr. Speaker. I think the government was probably surprised that this is how it all came out in the wash, because they had tried so hard to tangle it so beautifully that it couldn't be unravelled. But the ruling stated, "When reviewed in the context of the charter and the rights it provides, it becomes apparent that the process engaged in was fundamentally flawed. It could not, by its design, provide meaningful collective bargaining."

Mr. Speaker, that was then. This is now. So why am I rehashing? Why am I reopening old wounds? Partly because it hasn't been able to heal, because every time we have a conversation about education in this House, it's a conversation where the government is imposing its will, inserting itself into situations where maybe they don't need to. I would say that it feels a lot like bullying. It did back then, and I see that happening a little bit here.

However, before we get back to this point, I'm going to go back again. Bill 103: You might remember that there were midnight sittings, and it all had to be done quickly, as this government likes to do—and that was sending teachers back to work. Teachers in my board were on the picket line. There were three job actions at the time. It was called the Protecting the School Year Act—again, such a pretty title. That was Bill 103. We were here until quite late debating that and really getting into what protecting the school year should actually look like—what protecting education should look like as well. Those were some good discussions. It was nice to be able to talk about education. Unfortunately, it was in that context. That was too bad.

Here we have Bill 92. The different partners affected by this have been involved in the process and have made recommendations, and I want to share with you some of the feedback from those different groups.

CUPE Ontario calls this bill anti-democratic. That's pretty major. That was like when we used to call it unconstitutional, and then, guess what happened? It was unconstitutional. So here we have a bill that's being called anti-democratic. I'm inclined to agree. And they say this on the basis of the fact that the legislation "would take away the rights of school board support workers to democratically determine their participation in central bargaining with the provincial government."

The OSSTF is opposed to pieces of this because none of the 11 recommendations made by OSSTF were incorporated into the bill.

ETFO, the Elementary Teachers' Federation, indicates that very few of its recommendations were included in the bill. ETFO is opposed to the mandatory piece of central bargaining, the prescribed length for collective agreements, the requirement for an additional five days' notice—and that additional five days' notice, I'll come back to—and ETFO is concerned about requiring unions to become part of employee bargaining agencies.

They have concerns. But they have concerns about the pieces that the government just tossed in there for kicks. This piece of legislation was supposed to accomplish something specific, and that was to allow for contract extensions should the parties agree that that's what they want to do and they want to see. That's what was supposed to be included in this bill. Some of the extra parts are where we get into the contentious pieces and where we see divisions.

In all of the consultation and recommendations, there was no consensus able to be reached. Maybe there never could be consensus on all parts, but to not have any, to have all of the partners involved say, "Wait a second. We are not reflected in this"—that's needless.

1610

It comes back to what I was saying earlier: that I think this is a government that is bullying its way through structuring education here.

I want to talk a little less about that piece of it and a little more about education in general because we're talking about collective bargaining. Collective bargaining, as the Superior Court of Ontario said, should be meaningful. We know that it should be free; that parties involved in that bargaining and discussion process should be free to have those conversations. It shouldn't be dictated; it shouldn't be predetermined. It should be meaningful; it should be respectful. We're talking about education. Everybody at that table hopefully wants what's best for Ontario and Ontario's children, so you'd think that it could be respectful, but also, as I mentioned, without predetermined outcomes—back to that free and meaningful collective bargaining.

I wonder what the government's ultimate goal is. I hate to be so cynical, but having been a teacher in a classroom and watching the education system be, I would say, degraded by design and undermined intentionally with the cuts and the pulling of resources—reallocation of resources, but ultimately cutting—it was real. It was real and it had a very real impact on those children and on their futures.

I wonder what the government's vision is. I think, like we see with everything else, that it's about this government wanting to suck more control to Toronto and bring more in centrally. I think that's a shame. It is. Streamlining a process is one thing—coming to consensus and making things easier. There's something to be said for that, but when we think about boards in Rainy River or Oshawa, we've got different needs from each other and we need to always ensure and always protect the different voices in those communities—the trustees, the school boards, the parents and the teachers. They know what their community needs, and we need to always ensure that that's important and those voices are heard and that that is what determines some of the resources locally.

I know that this is about central bargaining and that's a separate issue, but I don't generally trust them because I've worked in the environment that they designed. Watching them pull more of that control to the centre and making those "I'm the boss" decisions—I don't know that that serves our children in the long run. I'm just putting it out there. I'm very concerned about the motivation behind what this government is doing in terms of the big picture. I don't often give them credit for long-range thinking and long-range planning, but in this case I worry about what the endgame is.

Listening to the member from Durham, who is the parliamentary assistant to education—he talked about wanting a strong public education system. That is, I hope, what we all want. He talked about maintaining public confidence, and I'd like to speak about that for a minute because I think it's about regaining public confidence rather than maintaining it. I'm inundated with letters from parents and teachers, and I've had some letters from students who talk about their learning environment. In some of the cases, I wouldn't call them learning environments. They're environments, yes, but they're being challenged when it comes to learning.

In the environment itself, we see more and more violence. We see fewer resources. We see more struggle in our classes. We see more struggle on the way to even get to school. The member from Nickel Belt talked the other day about four-year-olds on the buses spending all of this time commuting to and from school. It's becoming more of a struggle to get to the actual education piece, and that's a problem. When we don't see sustainable funding, when we are not seeing money put where it's supposed to go, whether that's into repairs or whether that's into resources and supports, that's a travesty. It really is.

I've got a letter here. This is from a teacher. This is speaking to the state of things, the state of our classrooms. We always hear from the minister that students have a right to a secure education, a safe and secure learning environment. This is a letter that I hope was also sent to her and that she gave some serious thought to.

"I am concerned about the level of safety in my classroom"—I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, this is a letter from a teacher, and one of many, by the way. I get them all the time. I also invite them, so keep them coming.

"I am concerned about the level of safety in my classroom. I have students on a daily basis running around and out of the room, destroying and trashing the classroom and disrupting the learning environment of my classroom. Students are getting hit, kicked, pinched, scratched, taunted because the behaviours cannot be dealt with in a timely fashion, or at all.... Incidents are not being reported because teachers are stressed, overwhelmed and many do not get to have any breaks," and they are not supported.

"It sounds terrible, I know, but there is really not enough support in order to maintain it all.... Teachers are telling me they are tired and they are exhausted and they are giving up ... losing hope.

"It's awful. I am unsure what to do, except ask for help.... Where are the people in charge who have to make the hard decisions to make real change in our struggling community and low-income family communities?" Great question.

I want to say, Speaker, that I'm hearing from teachers and I'm hearing from parents who want what's best for their kids. They don't know how to make that happen when they're fighting on all fronts.

Let's see. Maybe we don't have time for another full letter. I've got just pages and pages. Here's a piece of another letter.

"The reality is that these students need help. They need structure, guidance and support from local support system that are trained in"—specific—"areas. I am pleading with you. I'm begging you, please look inside our schools. There is a hidden mess that is about to burst, because administrators have to listen to the board," the boards need to listen to the Ontario ministry, and the

Ontario ministry needs to "put a new plan into place to change our old methods of handling things. Our old methods have done nothing for us as of late, except made the violence in the schools increase and make our schools more unsafe for students to learn and teachers to teach....

"We need to do something. Not later. Now.... Keep our schools safe, embrace your education system.... Give it your attention, because it's been left alone too long and there are issues, and we need to make sure our future education system is one we can be proud of. Help!"

I wish I'd brought letters from the students who talk about going on learning walks. Mr. Speaker, you would think that a learning walk would be a good thing, right? You go for a walk, you learn a little something. But what I'm hearing more and more is that "learning walk" is code, or is the euphemism for evacuation. When there's an incident in a classroom, a violent incident, that incident remains in place and the rest of the students are then removed from the classroom, because that's generally safer. I don't argue about that. But rather than saying, "Come on, kids, we're being evacuated," it's, "Let's go on a learning walk."

So students go home and talk about learning walks, but it is spending time out of the learning environment. It's spending time outside of the classroom. That is not a conducive learning environment. When these become predictable and regular, and the state of our education system has been degraded—I would say by design—for so long, where are we and how do we get back? How do we move forward?

I'm supposed to also talk about time allocation. Fine, I will. We are shutting down a conversation about collective bargaining—which is not unlike imposing a contract, really, but anyway. We see this time and time again with these time allocation motions. There is never enough time in committee. People can't travel.

The member from Algoma–Manitoulin reminded us earlier that even if someone were to want to travel to Toronto, they don't have trains anymore. They're limited in how they can even access this process; forget the fact that it's being so limited. So even if they were able to travel, it would have to be maybe in that one-day window or however many minutes they'd be able to make it here for.

These short conversation windows move things forward. How dare we take the time to talk about education, as the Attorney General has said, "without further debate"? Everything is "without further debate," and that's so disappointing, because this is something that requires further debate—and not just further debate, but more investment, more time, more interest and more commitment because we are talking about public education, and that, at the very least, is what it deserves.

Thank you, Speaker. That's my time.

1620

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

The member from—Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Speaker, how could you forget? Eastern Ontario, the gateway to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It's that great suit. That's a wonderful suit you've got on today. You distracted me.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I didn't expect that from a Maple Leafs fan.

Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today for yet another time allocation motion by this government. It's somewhat hard to believe, but this Liberal government has already forced a cut in debate through a time allocation motion 80 times without the support of a single opposition member. This takes a sledgehammer to the principle of reasoned, thoughtful and comprehensive debate on issues that affect every Ontarian—as my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke would say, a guillotine, and he would follow through with a big swoosh. But it just speaks to this open and transparent government.

This doesn't count the times the government moved for questions to be put, depriving many members of the House of the opportunity to voice local concerns on important issues. Numerous times, I have spent considerable time doing research, preparing appropriate data and collecting feedback from my residents of Stormont, Dundas and South Glengarry, only to find out just before I had a chance to speak that the government was cutting off debate.

The only time period this government had come to terms with the opposition to expedite proceedings occurred during the minority Parliament between 2011 and 2014. Then we cautiously supported Bill 122, which created a two-tiered negotiating framework. Bill 122 was viewed with broad optimism by both school boards and the teachers' unions. The PC caucus highlighted that it had to be a wait-and-see approach. We submitted an amendment to the committee that would have placed a sunset clause on the two-tier system after the first round of bargaining if the intended consequences were not achieved. This government, as it does with almost all amendments from the official opposition or the third party at committee, voted that down.

The Minister of Education has made the collective bargaining process less accountable, and Bill 92 also erodes the role of school board trustees even further. Centralizing processes in Toronto risks excluding local needs and local realities from the equation. Every school board's needs and situations are different, especially for rural public boards that have a mandate to provide education to all children regardless of where they live or the cost of providing it. Clearly, one size does not fit all situations, and this government has shown this over and over again as its policies have negatively affected rural and northern Ontario.

The Ministry of Education has also taken the wrong approach towards school boards for years. They expect that what works in Toronto will work everywhere, including in low-density areas where school boards' budgets are being squeezed by rising hydro costs, rising

maintenance costs, rising labour costs and other challenges.

The government has a special way of hiding cuts to our key public services. It certainly appears obvious to me that they have sworn these organizations to secrecy. We have seen cuts to hospital budgets frozen for four years with no public feedback. I sat in on a meeting a few years ago with a number of not-for-profit social service agencies and organizations with the member from Simcoe–Grey. They reported that they hadn't seen an increase in over five years, and one of them for 11 years. They said they quietly laid people off to pay for increased costs such as salaries, hydro and rent. When asked why we never heard about the issue, one responded, "We were told that if a negative story gets reported, next year's budget will be worse." They have been sworn to secrecy. One member of a hospital told me this happened just after the Liberal government came to power in 2004. So we see why we are not hearing that these agencies just quietly lay people off. Services are cut to make up the differences.

This should not happen in an open and transparent democracy. Although this government constantly talks about being open and transparent, the Liberal government is anything but.

As we speak to this closure motion, we have a tremendous turmoil going on across the province, especially in rural Ontario. We have over 600 schools listed for potential closure. But I'm proud of my residents in Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. With the announcement last fall, the communities rallied to show this Liberal government and the school boards the importance of local education. Large community meetings, with up to 1,000 parents, students and local residents attending, upset with the direction this government was taking—a government in Toronto that spoke hollow words about supporting rural and northern education, but hid behind the school boards, saying that it was a local decision; school boards that were forced to follow the policies of this government.

Where are the school boards? Why are we not hearing about the issues? A local long-time Liberal supporter in my riding who is also a trustee talks about the problems with the two-tier system. The issue is, most of the monetary issues are settled in Toronto, leaving not much left for the local to bargain. The only thing they can do is give up many important issues, because money has been taken off the table when it gets to them. Clearly, this is a problem, and clearly it has created a lot of problems throughout the system. But it has garnered support behind this Liberal government.

Trustees talk about secret deals that prohibit the use of technology, concerned that this rollover will just extend the contract another two years, especially in rural Ontario, where the use of technology is very important. But of course, they're not allowed to move towards it. It's interesting to see one of the superintendents mention that people on the boards and teachers are allowed to use this technology for their training, but they will not allow it to be passed on to students. We're handcuffing our school boards when it comes to allowing them to provide the best education that they can.

And where are all the union reps? I've never seen an industry where we've closed so many schools—if we were closing that many factories, there would be rallies in the street. We do not hear a word. Where are the teachers? I know that, locally, teachers are told that if they were to say anything, they would not be protected, if you can imagine that. That's not public, but in a meeting they were told that. I talked to one of the local representatives. They had told me that they would not be commenting on it. Later on, they changed that tune. But you can imagine, with the number of positions that would be lost—we're talking thousands—not a word.

What's behind this? One would have to worry or wonder about what could possibly happen in the background that would stop people from talking very passionately about their jobs in public. Because, certainly, individually and by themselves, they did come forth and they did help with a lot of what was going on. But we've got a government that swears everybody to secrecy. It's just not what you would expect in an open and transparent democracy.

We've seen this before. Not too many years ago, this government proceeded on the Green Energy Act, an act that we see now was advised against by their own agencies, the Ontario Energy Board and the IESO. We saw this last year when the cap-and-trade legislation went through. We saw members come forth—the Auditor General, the chief financial officer, the Ombudsman—talking about how oversight had been removed under this new legislation. They do not want the independent officers being able to see what is going on or where the money is spent.

We also heard that during the last, previous years—of course, they were being criticized for not listening to their own agencies, like the Ontario Energy Board, which were required at that time to comment on government policies, and which were overruled with almost a hundred ministerial directives. What was their answer? They removed the ability for them to comment. Why would you do that? If you're paying agencies to be your experts, why would you remove their ability to comment? I guess if they don't comment, or you don't allow them to comment, you can't be criticized for not listening to them.

1630

Look around this province at the mess we're in. We have people coming into my riding office who can't afford to pay their bills. We're talking about 60,000 people last year or the year before who had their power cut off. We see a government that refused to acknowledge an issue.

When I first got elected, the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers—an impartial group—wrote a large article on why the Green Energy Act would fail. It was because the system is not designed to accept the wind generators and solar farms. It was from a technical

point of view. The government refused to acknowledge it, and now we're seeing the impact: large costs, the most expensive system in North America. This is the result of a government that refuses to accept good debate, cutting off, refusing to look at amendments put forward by the other party.

I know my time is out and I have other people who need and want to speak, but it's too bad. We just see another cutting off of debate. We think the debate has caused a lot of problems in many areas, and it's just too bad that we see this same page.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: What a privilege it is to stand in my place on a Wednesday afternoon and talk about a piece of legislation which will fundamentally not address the key problems with collective bargaining in the province of Ontario.

But it's always a privilege, and I always, always have this sense of responsibility and weight when I'm addressing a piece of legislation. Unfortunately, in this instance, as my other colleagues have mentioned, the fact that Bill 92 is time-allocated is really one of those other steps that this government has taken which continue to undermine democracy in the province of Ontario.

I was just talking about this very issue, actually, at a rally not that long ago on electoral reform. I was telling the story of how I came to be here at Queen's Park, which is directly related to Bill 115, in September 2012. I was comparing the reality of being in a minority government—you remember those days. Those were good days, weren't they?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Oh, yes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I know—versus the reality of a Liberal majority that only actually received 40% of the vote. Of course, this is connected to the Prime Minister walking back his promise on electoral reform, which is most unfortunate, I think, because when I was here in the minority, because of Bill 115, politicians had to work harder. We had to work together. We had equal power on the committees. That's actually how we accessed a lot of the information as it related to the gas plants. And who doesn't want politicians to work harder, Mr. Speaker? I can tell you, the people of this province want us to come to this place and find the balance between collaboration and strengthening legislation.

When I did raise these points at this one particular rally, people liked the idea of a minority government. They directly, of course, associate a more balanced Legislature, a more balanced Parliament, with a more balanced electoral system. What an unfortunate turn of events, actually, for this country, that the Prime Minister has reneged on his promise that that last election, in 2015, would have been the last first-past-the-post.

I raise that because rarely do we have an opportunity in this province to weigh so heavily on the power imbalance at Queen's Park. But in that fall of 2012, as this government introduced Bill 115—I will talk a little bit about that in a second—the response in this province was one of great anger. There was a lot of emotion affiliated with it, because quite honestly, when you mess with the education system, you mess with everyone in the province of Ontario, from teachers to employees and, most importantly, the students who are in our school system.

History matters in this place. I would think the Liberal government would be paying closer attention to how we got to this place, how we are at this point in the debate on public education, and how the collective bargaining processes roll out in our education system.

For those who are just tuning in, this is government Bill 92, an amendment to the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2014—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I got my points in on electoral reform. I'm pretty happy now. If I had a microphone, I would drop it, but I don't.

I do want to say that, as I mentioned, history matters. When I think of actually the politics and the tension around education policy and legislation in this province, we have a long and sordid history. I myself actually became politically engaged because of the original Bill 160 that then-Premier Mike Harris brought in. I've always meant to thank him, because he got me so angry that I got engaged in the electoral process, in politics. Sometimes they say, "An enraged electorate is an engaged electorate," and in this instance, it was true. I could have thanked him, actually, the other day. Christina Blizzard was getting her mugging, and he was there, but he was quite busy at the time. So I didn't get the chance to do that.

It is important to understand—not the time allocation piece, because this has become pretty much routine on the part of this government. They have limited debate on significant pieces of legislation, omnibus bills that have passed through this place which did not get their due course of debate. We were prevented, as legislators, from doing our due diligence and bringing the voices of our constituents to this place and representing those concerns from our own ridings and, indeed, from across the province.

Certainly, on this side of the House, there is no disagreement about the importance of labour peace in fostering positive teaching and learning environments, in enabling students to thrive, and in making families feel confident their children will receive the resources and supports they need at school to get the best possible start in life.

I've said this many times, as a trustee—I served at the Waterloo Region District School Board for almost a decade—as president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association and as vice-president of the Canadian School Boards Association—that when we get education right, almost everything falls into place. That is how important it is. To say that it is the great equalizer in our society is not an overstatement. It is not overstating this point.

That is why it is so important to ensure that in the collective bargaining process the negotiations with the

people who are delivering the educational services or cleaning our schools or running our libraries are dealt with with respect, because that brings respect into the entire system. It sets the tone for the understanding—or a recognition, at least—by the government of the day that education matters and that their work matters. When that is acknowledged, there is a significant—I mean, the evidence and the research show that it changes the culture of education and has a direct impact on academic success for students across all economic statuses.

That is why this piece of legislation is important. That is why we should be debating it fully and not having it time-allocated. To be clear, the reason that we are here is that the government, in Bill 115, when they imposed the contract on the teacher unions and support staff unions in Ontario—when that happened, there was a complete shift in respect in the province of Ontario. When they imposed that contract, that changed the culture of education, just as much as what Mike Harris did in Bill 160, when his minister at the time—I believe it was Snobelen—said, "We are going to create a crisis in education." He got caught saying that, as you'll remember.

But this government essentially did create a crisis in education with Bill 115. They did. It was a very politically charged decision to impose those contracts. You'll remember, Mr. Speaker, there was a one-seat difference at that time between a minority government and a majority government, and that seat came into play in Kitchener–Waterloo when the former member, Elizabeth Witmer, did resign her seat.

1640

There was a play made by the Premier of the day, Mr. McGuinty, to play hardball with these unions to win that riding of Kitchener–Waterloo. I'm so proud of the people of that riding to this day, because not only did they stand up and vote in a way that they never had voted, ever—for a New Democrat—but they rallied together in support of the education system in that riding and then across the province.

It is true that the unions of the day came into that riding and mobilized, because they did not want to be manipulated in a political way. They felt that education was at risk when you impose and take away the duly fought for rights, charter rights, that have been part of the history of this province for so long, to just lay the table bare and impose terms and conditions.

I have to say that it's very powerful, actually, to have this opportunity to reflect on that experience. But at the time, after the crisis had been created with Bill 115, I think it's very clear that there was a general sense that collective bargaining had fundamentally been changed. The member at the time—I mean, I was watching the Legislature; I've always been one of those people who watch, much to the detriment of my social life. But during the debate on the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, my colleague—now my colleague—the member for Toronto–Danforth had this to say about Bill 115. He said, "The bill goes well beyond any prior attempt by the provincial government to constrain collective bargaining."

Mr. Arthur Potts: Ancient history.

Ms. Catherine Fife: "The authority given to the minister and cabinet effectively enables them to control both the process of bargaining and the results of bargaining, including the right to strike or lock out, and imposing collective agreements or their forms without any accountability to the Legislature."

The member from Toronto–Danforth went on to say, "The act interferes with the collective bargaining process set out under the Labour Relations Act on significant matters, such as wages and sick leave. It violates rights to freedom of association under section 3 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada.

"The act seeks to shield the actions of cabinet from any review by the courts, the labour board or boards of arbitration, in contravention of a legal concept as basic as the rule of law."

I want to give full credit. The member from London West, my good friend Peggy Sattler, has dug this up, because we have to remember this. The member from Beaches–East York said this is ancient history, but, Mr. Speaker, you have to acknowledge a mistake when it is made, you have to remember the mistake and you have to own it. That has never happened.

That's why we got Bill 122, to try to fix it. But you can't fix the fundamental undermining of basic charter rights with another piece of legislation which just moves the players to different tables. Bill 122, I would say, was a colossal failure. It was a colossal failure.

Bill 92, the amendment to the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, seeks to fix Bill 122. I would say, with some tongue in cheek, that there is no remedy in this piece of legislation towards that.

So here we are on March 1, 2017, debating a piece of legislation which seeks to solve problems that were fundamentally the creation of a government that has only been seeking power. That is what happened with Bill 115, clear and simple, plain and simple. It was supported at the time by the provincial Conservative Party. They voted to impose contracts on teachers. This happened in this place; it's a matter of record.

Bill 122 was an effort, if you will, on the part of the government to try to fix those relationships. But obviously the parties in play at the time, various unions—I believe OSSTF; ETFO, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario; the Canadian Union of Public Employees; the Ontario Public Service Employees Union—filed a complaint.

I think it's incredibly symbolic that here we are, on this day, and the story in the Globe and Mail by the reporter Caroline Alphonso reported today that "the Ontario Superior Court of Justice ruled last April that the government violated teachers' ... rights in 2012 when it temporarily suspended the right to strike, cut their sick days and imposed contracts on some education worker unions." The union has also said that it has reached a remedy on the lawsuit.

But it is very important, Mr. Speaker, that process matters. When the province imposed terms in Bill 115 which cut the wages of education workers, reduced their sick days and limited their ability to strike, the courts recognized—so the unions did launch "a court challenge, saying the province contravened their right to collective bargaining under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

"In his ruling last year, a judge asked the government and the unions to negotiate a remedy instead of having the court impose one."

The reason that this is so symbolic is that now the courts have recognized that rights were violated, and I think it's worth noting for the House that this very same issue has happened in Nova Scotia of late, with the Liberal government in Nova Scotia also playing the same kind of games with education workers.

As a former trustee, I have to tell you that in the almost a decade that I served at the Waterloo Region District School Board, we saw a fundamental shift in control which compromised the local voices of elected trustees at that table and saw the centralized power at this place dominate on almost every front, Mr. Speaker. So it is powerful for me to be in my place and to actually bring the voices of those school boards to the floor of this Legislature.

All four publicly funded school boards and their trustee associations have registered a letter with the Minister of Education, and they go on to say—it's a public letter, so I can say it—"We would be remiss if we did not express our significant disappointment with respect to a number of issues which we understand will not be tabled for amendment." So we have a flawed piece of legislation, even though significant consultation or selective consultation happened.

"Notably, during each of the subsequent consultations all four trustee/school board associations articulated their firm commitment to sequenced bargaining. It was our shared understanding that the crown also saw value in such an amendment, as a manner by which to provide greater stability within the sector. It is regrettable that such an amendment, which we firmly believe to be in the best interests of students, is no longer being considered by the crown." They go on to also express a deep concern with respect to "the crown's unwillingness to address the possibility of continuous sanctions...."

This is the pattern of this government: bringing pieces of legislation to the floor of this Legislature that are incomplete, that do not address the core issues or the core problems—which, ironically, as in this instance, were created by the government—and then they time-allocate it, and so they reduce our ability to actually make it stronger. That, Mr. Speaker, compromises our democracy. It compromises our role as duly elected representatives from our riding, and it is a missed opportunity to strengthen public education by respecting the people who serve in our schools.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Todd Smith: Good afternoon, Speaker. I wish it was a pleasure to speak to yet another bill in the Legislature, but instead of speaking on the bill, we're actually speaking to another time allocation motion.

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Do you know what Barry Bonds, Rickey Henderson, Kobe Bryant and Chris Chelios have in common? They all wore number 24. That's how many times this government, since the election, has invoked time allocation here in the Legislature. They have brought in time allocation 24 times. They brought in so many time allocation motions over the last couple of years that our whip, Mr. Yakabuski from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke—when they started bringing in the time allocation motions, he would make the guillotine sound and he would slam his hand on his desk. He can't do that any longer because he has done so much damage to his hand and his ulna in his wrist that he doesn't do that anymore, because the government has made such a practice of time allocation here in the Legislature, as the member from Kitchener–Waterloo just said, cutting off debate here in the Legislature, gagging the opposition parties in the Legislature, who were sent here to bring the views of their constituents to Queen's Park on all kinds of different pieces of legislation. We all took the vow that we would do that, but this government won't let us do it. They won't let us do it.

So 24 times—the big two-four—they have brought in time allocation, and they're doing it now on Bill 92. It was used in the instance we're discussing today. Our critic from Whitby–Oshawa talked about it at length. The critic from Oshawa, his neighbour from the third party, talked about it at length as well—what's in that bill. It was used to time-allocate a bill literally one week after it was introduced. One week ago, the government introduced this bill, and they've already decided to time-allocate it.

It wasn't used, however, on Bill 27. You'll remember Bill 27. They introduced that one back in June. Then they prorogued. Then they introduced it again. However, instead of fast-tracking that bill, they played politics with that one, because there was something in there that the third party wasn't necessarily supportive of. It was an omnibus bill that dealt with reducing red tape in all kinds of different sectors and ministries and acts. But what did they try and do? Instead of passing Bill 27, which would have made it illegal for disconnections of people in their homes in the wintertime, they played politics with that one. Instead of bringing in a separate bill that would have helped people who can't afford to pay for their electricity because of the terrible mismanagement that this government has invoked on that sector with the Green Energy Act, they played politics with Bill 27 and they let people freeze in their homes this winter—all for a couple of points, and I don't even think they got the points, Mr. Speaker. Thankfully, they came to their senses, and we passed Bill 27, which no longer allows winter disconnections to occur in the province of Ontario.

The bill literally could have been passed along with the other 23. I don't know how they decide which ones end up on the fast-track list, but 24 of them have landed on that list since Kathleen Wynne was elected as Premier in Ontario.

The purpose of time allocation is an emergency measure. If there's an imminent crisis or a piece of time-sensitive legislation for which the government has not had adequate time to prepare the House, it can be used at that time. But it's by nature a blunt instrument that they're using. It's supposed to be used sparingly. How many times have they used it? Twenty-four times, they've used it. Arguably, it could have been used for Bill 27 prior to Christmas break, although I believe the government would have had a hard time arguing that it didn't see winter coming; we all saw winter coming. Members of the government say ridiculous things every day. This would have hardly been out of the norm for members opposite. But, at least in that case, an argument could have been forwarded that the bill needed to be passed by the start of winter. Instead, they dragged their heels on that one.

Here, no such storyline is necessary. We're due to rise before the school year ends. We're five sitting days into a new session. We're due to sit for quite a while before we rise on June 1. While I can appreciate the need for the government to feed the spin machine or do anything to change the story from a list of ethics scandals, wasteful spending and, of course, high hydro bills—they'll do it. They'll take whatever opportunity they can to try and turn the channel.

My friends in the NDP have pointed out in the past that Liberals don't want to work. I've heard a few of them say that. This House acts like a stamp for the Premier's office instead of a check and balance on the Premier's office. That might be in the job description for a Liberal member; it certainly isn't on this side of the House.

But here we are, Speaker: a motion to move time allocation for the 24th time. That's 24 times the Premier has decided that the opinions of the other members of this Legislature, 105 of them—107 actually, but there's 105 other ones, right? Who's counting? So it's not shocking. It's not shocking.

This is the same Premier who said that Ontarians were "bad actors." Remember that? She said Ontarians were bad actors. It's the same government whose Treasury Board president said recently that GO train riders weren't smart enough to understand the electricity system. It's the same government whose energy minister had to make clear on a London radio show a couple of weeks ago that he wasn't calling people dumb as he explained that they didn't understand their hydro bills. This government has, at every step of the way, demonstrated nothing but contempt for the people of Ontario and, on top of that, they're the people that they elect to represent them in this chamber.

That's why we've had 24 time allocation motions since the last election. If you don't respect the people of Ontario—I've used three examples that have occurred since just last fall to demonstrate that this government clearly doesn't—then you don't care what goes on in here.

We've seen a systemic concentration of power in the Premier's office over the last three years. We've seen a government that has regularly announced major pieces of legislation outside of this House or they've leaked them on the front page of the Toronto Star before they were ever announced.

We've seen a government that has regularly made budget announcements before the budget was presented to the House. We've seen a government that has regularly picked fights with the province's Auditor General. Someone with a far more impressive resumé than anyone in cabinet, the Auditor General—they pick on her because they don't like her reports. But that's what this government does. If anybody criticizes them, they blame them of creating fake news. The Minister of Economic Development had to apologize just last week—just last week. They don't like to be criticized, but all they're getting is criticism because the decisions they've made over the last 14 years have turned Ontario's electricity system into a basket case.

They've done all of these things to systematically weaken the voice of the people here in Ontario. They've done all of these things because this government and this Premier believe that they cannot be wrong. And you would only use time allocation 24 times if you didn't care what other people thought. The fact exists, regardless of whether we're talking about Bill 92, Bill 27 or any of the myriad of other pieces of government legislation that have had time allocation imposed on them since the last election.

There's a feeling among the people of Ontario that I don't feel should be ignored. They think government is unresponsive in Ontario. They think it's ignorant to any concern with which the governing party happens to disagree. I'd actually go as far as to say that they see the inability of government to respond to their concerns as a reason to lose faith in the institutions of government, including this place. That practice is unlikely to be helped by the repeated use of time allocation to silence members of the opposition parties. The use of this tactic and, in particular, the government's abuse of this tactic, is undermining this place. Of that, there can be no doubt. This is the 24th time that they've brought in time allocation here, and it's time it ends.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be opposing this motion, by the way, just in case you were wondering.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: It's a pleasure to rise on, I guess, really the first bit of debate since we returned from our winter break when we spent time with the constituents. I know that many of us spent a lot of time on the standing committee on finance's tour across Ontario, where we heard loud and clear from families, nurses, seniors and the business community about the state of affairs.

1700

I know that we're here to talk about a time allocation motion. One of the reasons that the government time-allocates—let's explain that to the people as well. It means the time that we get to talk about something is truncated; it's cut off; it's allocated in a very small portion. I was thinking—we just really got back from our

winter break—that what happened just days before, minutes before, we went on our break was the Auditor General's report. It occurs to me that that's one of the reasons why we have time allocation, because the government really does not want to hear arguments from the people or hear from us sharing some of the stories from the people. They just don't want to hear about that. It's the reality that's out there and, to be quite frank, they can't face the reality.

So we've got an Auditor General's report that came out in December that they don't want us to talk about, but I've got seven minutes and 16 seconds, so I'm going to spend a little bit of time just reading some of the headlines from the Auditor General's report. It was a very lengthy, two-volume report. It must have been more than 1,000 pages; if I remember it correctly, it was about 1,000 pages this year. It was a very lengthy one. But these are just the titles.

First of all, the title of her news release was, "2016 Annual Report Identifies Need for Improvements." Right off the bat, we get the tone of what this is. She spent a lot of time—and you would have heard some stories—talking about the parts of the bridge that were built upside down and that type of thing, and where Metrolinx came under scrutiny for spending $4 billion over the last five years on construction projects that went awry. You would have heard about the company that, after performing poorly and receiving a letter of default, was awarded 22 more projects totalling $90 million. This was for a company that had failed miserably and was in default. This is the kind of thing the auditor told us about. They continued to have their performance rated as poor, and then they were rehired for yet another, $39-million contract.

That's the kind of thing that they don't want us to talk about. That's why they time-allocate. That's why they say, "You don't get to talk about the topic anymore." Because we haven't really fleshed out the Auditor General's report.

Under Employment Ontario, she said, "Better Information Needed If Employment and Training Programs Are To Be Effective." She was very critical of the $1 billion that was sent out and spent: that only 38% of the people using that service report being employed full-time, and fewer than half who began as an apprentice completed it. These are the kinds of facts the auditor talked about that they don't want us to address.

Electronic health—you'll remember the eHealth scandal from some years ago. Well, the auditor said to us, "eHealth Still Unfinished After 14 Years and $8 Billion" spent. That's the kind of information, Speaker.

This goes on and on and on. The Ministry of Transportation: "Substandard Asphalt Leads to Early Cracking of Provincial Highways"—terrible story there, where, after finding out that these contractors were using substandard material, they bonused $8 million annually.

Specialty psychiatric hospital service: The auditor said, "Ontario Lacks Comprehensive Provincial Mental Health Standards." It was alarming, Speaker, that the number of people going to emergency rooms with mental health issues rose 21% in the last five years, but Ontario still does not have a provincial mental health standard for admissions.

So they time-allocate. They take the hours away that we have to debate important issues by time-allocating them, so that we can't talk about these things. Well, I'm going to use my time to talk about these things.

Still, the one that is the be-all and end-all is the review of government advertising. The auditor said, "Government Using Public Funds To Do More Self-Promotion." That was what we heard from the Auditor General.

Over the last month—the few days of us being here and the last couple of weeks of us being on our constituency opportunity—when we went to the all-party hearings, we heard very loudly and clearly from the Liberals' witness, Mr. Craig Wright, who is the senior vice-president of Royal Bank, the bank's chief economist and one of our five chief economists, that any carbon tax should be revenue-neutral. In fact, what he said was:

"What I typically think of successful carbon pricing agreements is that they have to be transparent … predictable … gradual and, most importantly, they have to be revenue-neutral ... The issue is that carbon pricing is to change the structure of the economy; it's not about growing the size of government, and that's when you get into this revenue-neutral side. If it's just about the government grabbing more money and then reallocating it"—which is what they're doing—"that's less than ideal, especially in the context of a more competitive environment."

That's what the government doesn't want us talking about, Speaker. In fact, their own witness, Craig Wright, went on to say, "I think electricity is one of the many areas that makes Ontario investment less attractive than only a short while ago."

That's what we heard at committee. That's what they don't want us to hear. In fact, the senior vice-president of Maple Leaf Foods told the committee, "Our electricity price … increased by 18% in 2016 … if we had operated in Manitoba instead of Ontario … it would have been a 65% saving on our electricity bill." That's an astounding revelation that the government doesn't want us in here talking about.

Food and Beverage Ontario came to the committee, and here is their quote: "'We've had enough. We're starting to look at the alternatives south of the border.'" Speaker, we heard an awful lot about companies who (a) have either moved south of the border for cheaper electricity or (b), are planning to.

Frank Dottori, the CEO of White River Forest Products, a great friend to many of us in northern Ontario—

Mr. Arthur Potts: Speaker, a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order, the member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I have no idea if the last four minutes that he has been speaking have anything to do with time allocation of the bill. He is reading on about

Manitoba hydro rates. I think we should bring it in somewhere closer to the allocation—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you very much. I guess that would end up being my determination. I feel that he has skirted around the issue and he's within the boundaries. Continue.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you.

On those Manitoba rates, let me just repeat them. The idea of time allocation is I'm to talk about why we don't believe in time allocation. I'm not here to talk about the issue that they're time-allocating.

So let me repeat that quote from Manitoba. This is from Rory McAlpine, a senior vice-president with Maple Leaf Foods, who said their electricity rates went up 18% in 2016: "If we had operated in Manitoba instead of Ontario … it would have been a 65% saving on our electricity bill." I hope that helps you understand that now.

Frank Dottori—here's what Frank had to say: "Most jurisdictions use energy costs to promote economic development, not to kill jobs, which is what we're doing in Ontario."

Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to expose some of the goings-on of the last two months.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? Second call for further debate. Last call for further debate.

Seeing none, Mr. Naqvi has moved government notice of motion number 7. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

I believe the ayes have it.

Minister of Labour, do you have something for me?

Oh, call in the members. It will be a 10-minute bell.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Okay, and then I come down.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Now you come down with the deferral. I don't know why they make me call the bell, but anyway, whatever.

There's a motion for a deferral. This will be deferred until tomorrow after question period.

Vote deferred.

1710

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'AIDE MÉDICALE À MOURIR

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 28, 2017, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 84, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to medical assistance in dying / Projet de loi 84, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'aide médicale à mourir.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my honour to get to rise today on behalf of my constituents of Windsor West to speak to Bill 84, Medical Assistance in Dying Statute Law Amendment Act, 2016.

Speaker, as you are probably well aware, assisted dying became legal in Canada on June 6, 2016. What this bill sets out to do, so that we are in line with a Supreme Court ruling that has made it so that the federal government had to bring forward legislation around medical assistance in dying—this is supposed to bring the province of Ontario in line with that legislation. We need our own separate legislation. Because of that, there is a need to amend several different acts in order to come into line with that decision.

What this bill sets out to do is amend the Coroners Act to clarify the role of the provincial coroner by requiring that the coroner be notified of all medical assistance in dying—or, short form, we call it MAID—deaths by the attending physician or nurse practitioner. It also allows the coroner the discretion to determine whether to investigate that particular death. It also mandates that the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services conduct a review of the coroner's role within two years. So every time a medical professional provides medical assistance in dying, that has to be reported to the coroner, and the coroner has to actually record every one of those instances. This would mandate that the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services would conduct a review of the coroner's role within two years of this legislation coming into effect.

It also amends the Excellent Care for All Act to ensure that the fact that a person received MAID cannot be invoked as a reason to deny a right or refuse a benefit that would otherwise be provided under a contract or statute. It provides immunity for physicians, nurse practitioners and those who assist them in the lawful provision of MAID, except in cases of alleged negligence. Basically, what this means is that if someone has a life insurance policy in place or some kind of benefit in place that would be paid out or forwarded to whoever that particular person wanted it to go to, the beneficiary, that would still be in place. It would be eligible, and that particular provision would have to be paid out as agreed upon.

It also gives immunity to physicians, nurses and other health care practitioners such as pharmacists so that if they provide medical assistance in dying, they could not be found criminally responsible. This makes it legal for them to provide that assistance. The only time that it would be called into question is if there was an allegation of negligence. If it was seen that there wasn't due diligence done prior to providing the assistance, then there would be the opportunity for governing bodies such as the Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons to actually look into the behaviour of a surgeon who provided that medical aid, and they would get to deem whether or not there was negligence in the behaviour of that physician.

It also amends the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act to exclude from FIPPA and MFIPPA identifying information about clinicians and facilities that provide MAID. What that means is that somebody can file a freedom-of-information request, but what they will not get are the names of the clinics or the physicians that actually provide medical assistance in dying. It's there to protect those who provide this service.

It amends the Vital Statistics Act and regulation 1094 under the act to clarify that the coroner does not need to sign a medical certificate of death for MAID deaths unless the coroner chooses to investigate the death. The coroner has the ability to not sign a medical certificate and to choose whether or not they want to investigate a death.

It amends the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act to clarify that a worker who receives MAID is deemed to have died from the injury or disease for which the worker was deemed eligible to receive MAID. This is designed to ensure that a claim made under the WSIA, where the worker received MAID, would be determined based on the illness or the disease, not based on MAID as the cause of death. Basically, they're looking at an existing condition that the person had prior to seeking out medical assistance in dying. They look at that pre-existing condition, and therefore they would still qualify under WSIA for all of the benefits of that particular act.

Speaker, I don't think that we can really get too far into this without acknowledging that this is a very serious conversation. It's a very emotional conversation. There are people on both sides of this: There are people who are supportive and there are those who oppose it. But what we found out through the process, what we are hearing, is that there was a lack of engagement when it came to Ontarians and what it is they really want. Ontarians are saying that when it comes to this very serious discussion—a very personal discussion—they actually didn't have a say. They didn't get an opportunity to discuss how they feel. They didn't get an opportunity to explain why they support it or why they don't support it. They didn't have an opportunity to have a discussion with the government—a discussion that may have made them change their mind about how they feel. They didn't get to ask questions and get answers.

This is something that we hear time and time again when it comes to legislation being brought forward by this government, that the people in this province don't feel like they have an opportunity to express their concerns; to express, even, their support sometimes; to have their questions and their concerns addressed; and to really have a say on the legislation that we in this chamber impose on them. I think that's an interesting point, after the conversation we just had about how the government likes to time-allocate and impose legislation.

I don't think we can talk about something like medical assistance in dying without addressing the health care system as a whole and some of the things that we've heard from Ontarians regarding our health care system. The first thing that I'm going to talk about is mental health supports in this province.

I recently had a friend who had a daughter, a 19-year-old daughter, who had some mental health issues and had difficulties accessing community supports in a timely manner. Unfortunately, this young lady, at 19 years of age, took her own life and is no longer with us. What her family is now dealing with is not only the loss of a daughter, but her two mothers have been told that in order to receive grief counselling—so this is still new. McKenzie passed away not too long ago, just a few short weeks ago. Her parents, her mothers, have asked for grief counselling and have been told, through CMHA, that in order to receive community grief counselling, her parents will have to wait at least six to eight weeks before they will be able to see anybody—or, sorry, it was four to six weeks for the adults. What is worse than that is that her two much younger sisters will have to wait six to eight weeks before they're able to see a grief counsellor and deal with the loss of their sibling.

Today, we had students in from the Canadian Federation of Students. They had their lobby day today, and they brought a package with them. I'm sure many of us, if not all of us in this chamber, were visited by these students, and they brought a package and a proposal with them. It is called Investment and Impact. Part of their proposal for the 2017 budget, part of their recommendations, is directly related to mental health supports for students. They recognize that in the community the supports for those with mental health concerns are lacking, based largely on lack of funding for these organizations, for these supports.

1720

Students are now saying that they can access mental health supports directly on campus. So they don't have to step out into the community for support; they can get them on campus. However, they're facing the same wait-times on campus as they would be if they went out for community support. We're finding an alarming increase in the youth in this province—an alarming increase in mental health issues—and that's something that needs to be addressed before we find another young person like McKenzie who feels likes she has nowhere else to turn, can't get the support she needs and ends up taking her own life.

Another issue we need to address when we're talking about health care is our hospitals and the chronic underfunding of our hospital system. In fact, there was a four-year freeze on hospital funding in their budgets.

Speaker, I don't think anybody in this chamber is unaware of the fact that the cost of living has gone up; the cost of doing business has gone up; the cost of everything has gone up. To maintain or upgrade equipment is expensive in a hospital. For those who have worked in the medical field, whether that's in a hospital, whether that's in a doctor's office—I worked in a dental office—when you look at just the basic supplies they need in order to treat patients, those supplies are surprisingly

expensive. The cost of gauze—people would think gauze would not be that expensive. It can be very expensive. Yet hospitals had their budgets frozen for four years. Then, again, all we have to do is look at the cost of energy and how much that has gone up. Hospitals can't turn off their lights; they can't turn off equipment. They need to keep those things running, and yet their budgets were frozen for four years and not dealing with the cost of things rising.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order, the member from Davenport.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I'm listening attentively to the member opposite, and I think it's important that she actually speak to the bill that we're here to debate this afternoon, which is Bill 84. Perhaps I'd ask the member just to bring that conversation back.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I have a tendency to feel that the member may be straying a little bit. So if she could get back to the bill, I'd appreciate it. Thanks.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. I believe that this actually directly relates to the bill we're talking about because we're talking about a lack of resources for the medical professionals who—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I don't appreciate you arguing with me on my decision. Just stick to the bill.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. My apologies. I wasn't arguing with you; I was stating where I was going with this.

When we're talking about hospitals and we're talking about health care and physicians and other medical professionals who are already struggling with a lack of resources, we are now looking at tying in another piece of the health care system and the services they will be providing. We need to be looking at, when we're talking about health care and funding the health care system, what kind of money is going to be available to train the physicians and the health care professionals to be able to provide medical assistance in dying. We need to look at what kind of funding is in place for those who do provide medical assistance in dying so that they have the proper mental health supports they are going to need going forward.

Again, I believe that when we're talking about MAID, we're talking about a bigger picture than just talking about the actual act of providing medical assistance in dying. We're talking about what that's going to look like to properly support the professionals who will be providing this service. I think it's important for the government side—although it doesn't appear that they think it's all tied together—to recognize that it's more than just what's before us. It's a bigger piece. They need to be looking at how they're going to support people and how they're going to fund the supports that our medical professionals are going to need.

When we're talking about supporting medical professionals and the funding of the health care system, and specifically those who are going to provide medical assistance in dying, there will be doctors and nurses and pharmacists who are going to be providing this service. I have a real concern, specifically in my riding, when it comes to the medical professionals, because what we are seeing because of underfunding of the system is that Windsor lost over 140 registered nurses. So our system in Windsor is already stretched as far as it can go. Actually, it's stretched well beyond. We just had a recent flu outbreak, as many ridings did, and our hospital was over capacity. We didn't receive funding for that. That comes from somewhere. Where is that going to come from? Is that going to come from funding that would come forward to train those who provide medical assistance in dying? Is that money coming from the funding to be providing mental health supports to the professionals that provide medical assistance in dying?

I know that because of the Supreme Court this is a conversation that has to take place, and I know that there was a ruling that said it had to happen quickly. But that doesn't mean that it can't be a thorough process. It doesn't mean that the government just pushes through legislation without listening to the people in this province. It doesn't mean that the government side can just forge ahead without listening to the very real concerns of the medical professionals that are going to be providing these services—or, for that matter, the medical professionals who will choose not to provide these services. They need to understand why. I think, Speaker, when you talk to the medical professionals, you will find that many of them will express the same concerns that I have today.

We need to look at supports. What is it going to look like, support-wise, for those families who have a family member who is struggling and who qualifies for medical assistance in dying and is provided with that service? What is it going to look like for the family members, like my friend Sheri, who then need support themselves? We need to make sure the government has put some real thought into that to make sure there is funding and there are supports in place for them, to make sure that when they reach out for assistance, it's there for them. As I said, this is a very sensitive, very emotional and very personal decision and discussion for those who decide that they want to access the service of medical assistance in dying, but the same applies to their friends and family members.

These are very real concerns. I'm not just pulling these out of thin air. Ontarians have reached out to us and shared those. I have had people in my riding, both very close friends, family members and many of my constituents, who have come forward and expressed concerns. One of their number one concerns is that they don't feel—or they know. It's not that they don't feel; they know that they didn't really have a voice when it came to this legislation. They would have loved to have an opportunity to share their concerns and share their thoughts. Some of them are on the side of support and some of them are not, but every single one of them deserves to be heard.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to respond to the member from Windsor West. I want to say that she started off very well on the bill in terms of explaining what the bill is about. The bill is not about whether there is going to be medical assistance in dying; the bill is about protecting those people who are going to be involved in that. I know the member has a bill before the House. It's a bill that talks about the health care system reacting in the same way, in the spirit of MAID, which is compassion and mercy and love. I support that bill.

I just want to make it clear that we didn't impose anything on people. From the point of consultations, we led the pan-provincial panel on how we were going to put this together. We had consultations in Ottawa and Toronto, forums there. We had an online forum. We had a very thorough process. I want to guarantee you that people are working very hard on all those things that you spoke about.

The second thing I want to tell you is that the member from Nickel Belt, in her presentation, said there had been no consultations. Well, in her community, her hospital had a consultation specifically about this that had a thousand people over two days.

1730

I agree with the member: This is a really critical issue for us to discuss and be out there with, and we have a responsibility to do that. I mentioned this yesterday in debate with the member from Essex. I think we have to be careful about wagging a finger with regard to consultation because it has been done; the work is being done, and what's most important about the bill is that we protect those rights that the member so eloquently expressed at the beginning of her remarks.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm not going to get time today to speak for very long on Bill 84, the Medical Assistance in Dying Statute Law Amendment Act—which we're also calling MAID, which kind of bothers me. Sometimes acronyms get put in certain ways, and I would almost change the name so that we could have a different name, personally.

I just met with some doctors and spoke on the phone with doctors in my riding. I haven't heard from too many other health care professionals, but a few have contacted our office. There's a lot of concern over the bill. I think there's support across the province, for the most part, that we need to get more in line with other provinces and with federal legislation, but there's a big concern about ensuring that our health care professionals—the registered nurses and the professional nurses and our doctors—can practise medicine with their conscience.

I just want to mention, as the wife of a physician and the mother of a physician and having a lot of friends who are physicians, that there's a certain type of personality that goes into medicine. It's not a career you take lightly. It's not something you do for a couple of months; it's a long haul, and it's very compassionate people.

My husband is the type of person who doesn't squish a spider or swat a fly; he catches them. He's very quick. He'll spend quite a bit of time doing it, Mr. Speaker, and he will open up the patio door and put them outside. My kids, if they saw me stomping on anything alive, would threaten to tell him, so I learned very quickly, once they could speak, not to do that.

This is why our health care professionals go into health care, and we have to respect that conscience, that personality that they have. We want those people in health care, and they will choose not to go into health care professions if we're forcing them to do something against their conscience.

Again, I'm happy to speak some more tomorrow, when it's my time. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Kitchener–Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I want to commend the member from Windsor West, because she delved into the fallout from MAID. It needs to be said that there is a disconnect, actually, with the health care system, and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care acknowledges that. They say that they anticipate that the number of MAID cases to rise annually over time as the practice becomes integrated and accessible within the health care system.

The member from Windsor West, though, is acknowledging that the health care system is not ready for that integration. We need to address those issues, because this practice and this very difficult decision is actually fraught with judgment and criticism, so the system as a whole will have to be able to respond to a very emotional decision from family members and from the profession, as the member has just recognized, because this is uncharted territory for Ontarians.

Having had a friend who just went through this process in the last month, there is a trauma that is experienced that you cannot prepare for—you cannot. The front-line workers who are part of the process, I think, will need some supports. These were the points that the member was making.

There are obviously outstanding issues. There's a lack of answers to people's questions and concerns about access to MAID. There's a lack of information and support for health care practitioners. There's a lack of access to palliative and end-of-life care options, including hospice services. We have to be upfront and honest about the landscape, and prepare for the fallout, because this is, as I said, an emotionally turbulent issue fraught with judgment on both sides.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate on Bill 84 and to offer some comments, I think, in support of what the member from Windsor West said, because I think what she was saying is that, at the end of the day, she's going to support this bill. I would hope that all members in the House do. If it needs some amendments along the way or whatever happens through the committee process, I'll leave that to the individual members.

This is a very sensitive issue, Speaker. I think people, over the years, have wondered if we could ever come to grips with this issue because of the sensitivity. It really speaks to the human passage through life, and at the end of life often people find themselves in very painful situations, very difficult situations.

I don't think that we've been able to come to grips with the dying process, because it's such a difficult process and it's surrounded by so much mystery. But we know that there's a group of people that we rely on as that is taking place, either for ourselves or for our loved ones, and that's our health care professionals. Certainly, I think they see people at the happiest times of their life, and no doubt, Speaker, health care professionals see people at the saddest times of their life, and that often involves the loss of a loved one. So we look to our medical professionals and our health care workers to provide us with the support when we need it.

Now that we've made a decision, as a country, that we need to address this issue at the federal level, it's incumbent upon the province of Ontario—we've done the right thing in bringing Bill 84 to the House for debate. Most of the debate, if not all the debate I've heard from all parties, has been very, very sensitive. It speaks to, perhaps, the non-partisan attitude we need to bring to a bill like this, because this is simply something that we need to get right. It's so important for people. It gets right to that most difficult part of life. I think it deserves the support of the entire House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Windsor has two minutes.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'd like to thank the members from Ottawa South, Thornhill and Kitchener–Waterloo and the Minister of Labour for their comments.

The member from Ottawa South had talked about how we can't say there wasn't consultation, and then he mentioned a consultation in Ottawa, in Toronto, and that they did it online. Not everybody has access to the Internet. Not everybody knows how to use the Internet. Then he mentioned Nickel Belt. But I'll point out that Nickel Belt is not Windsor, is not Niagara Falls, is not Hamilton, is not Kitchener, is not—my point is, they didn't widely consult. You cannot push aside the concerns of my constituents who have come to me, whether letter-writing, emailing or phone-calling, to say that they didn't have an opportunity to have input.

I think it's really important for people, especially when it comes to something that is so emotional and so personal, for people to at least feel like they had an opportunity to say something and that they were heard. We may not always agree with them, but they need the opportunity to have a say. That was the only point that I was trying to make about consultation, especially when it comes to something of this gravity.

I think that it's important that the government recognize—and if they don't, then they need to come to the realization soon—that when you're talking about something like medical assistance in dying, you cannot look at this one particular piece in isolation. There is so much more behind a piece of legislation like this. What I'm asking is that you make sure that when we're talking about or implementing something like this, the professionals and the family members have the resources and the supports that they need. Some of that comes from our hospital system. Some of that comes from community care. But, please, make sure that they have the assistance that they need.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me to speak on this very important bill, Bill 84, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to medical assistance in dying. This is a very serious bill and of course a serious issue, and I respect the debate that is taking place in this House.

Our government has introduced legislation, Bill 84, that would, if passed, support the implementation of medical assistance in dying by providing more protection and greater clarity for patients, their families and their health care providers. As members of this House know, medical assistance in dying is permissible in Canada because the Supreme Court of Canada found in a ruling that it was unconstitutional not to permit it. Following that decision by the Supreme Court of Canada, there is federal legislation that allows for it and, of course, there is a provincial component to it as well in terms of the delivery of those services. You have Bill 84 as a result of it.

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This new legislation helps to ensure a safe and consistent approach to physician-assisted dying across the country. We realize that end-of-life care is an important and complex issue, and we are committed to a respectful, patient-centred approach that supports patients' rights while protecting the vulnerable. We have an obligation to our professional health care workers and institutions with regard to striking a balance, as well. That is why we have established a referral service to support physicians. It is also why we will be developing a care coordination service to ensure that all patients get access to the information they need.

This new legislation helps to ensure a safe and consistent approach to physician-assisted dying across the country. This legislation will ensure that benefits such as insurance payouts and workplace safety benefits are not denied because of a medically assisted death.

Health care professionals and those who assist them are protected from civil liability when lawfully providing medical assistance in dying. Also, health care providers and facilities that provide medical assistance in dying have their privacy protected. There will also continue to be effective reporting and monitoring of medical assistance-in-dying cases.

As a government, we are continuing to work with our federal and provincial partners as we move forward with implementing our approach to assisted death. We realize that end-of-life care is an important and complex issue. We are committed to a respectful, patient-centred

approach that supports patient choice while protecting the vulnerable.

Since June, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has been conducting biweekly webinars with health care system leaders, professional and sector organizations and patient advocates. These consultations have allowed our government an opportunity to provide updates, clarify issues and respond directly to stakeholder inquiries.

We have also reached out to diverse health and legal stakeholders to solicit their input and feedback on the implementation of medical assistance in dying in Ontario. More than 45 different stakeholder groups were engaged to discuss key issues, identify concerns and help support future implementation of medical assistance in dying.

We also held a series of 11 in-person town hall sessions across Ontario, nine sessions in English and two in French, in Sudbury and my hometown of Ottawa. English sessions were held in Sudbury, in my community of Ottawa—in fact, it was in Ottawa Centre—Toronto, Sault Ste. Marie, Barrie, Kingston, London, Thunder Bay and Windsor.

Our government recognizes that we have a fundamental obligation to our professional health care workers, institutions and patients. That is why we have introduced Bill 84. This bill, if passed, will provide more protection and greater clarity for patients, their families and their health care providers. Our government has worked hard to strike the right balance in providing patients with the compassionate care they need and deserve while also protecting our health care workers.

For patients, these changes to legislation will protect them from being denied benefits they would otherwise be entitled to, such as life insurance, while also allowing the coroner to oversee deaths to ensure that medical assistance in dying is being provided in accordance with the law. The legislation would also provide assurance to clinicians of their confidentiality and protections from civil liability if they provide medical assistance in dying legally and in a non-negligent way.

In addition, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, the College of Nurses of Ontario and the Ontario College of Pharmacists have prepared guidance documents on medical assistance in dying. A clinician referral service has been established to support the connection of patients seeking medical assistance in dying with willing clinicians.

We have no intention of requiring any clinician who is opposed to medically assistance in dying to participate in providing it. However, it is expected that all clinicians provide the same level of care as they do with existing health care services when providing patients with medical-assistance-in-dying-related services. In Ontario, for instance, health regulatory colleges are responsible for regulating their respective professions in the public interest. In doing so, colleges may establish policies and standards that their members must comply with, including policies and standards regarding medical assistance in dying.

Under existing college policies, both physicians and nurse practitioners must make an effective referral if they object to providing the requested medical service personally. The Ministry of Health has established a clinician referral service which helps clinicians make referrals to other health care providers willing to provide medical assistance in dying.

In addition to the proposed legislative amendments, Ontario has been exploring ways to support access to medical assistance in dying for eligible patients. Ontario will be establishing a care coordination service that can be accessed by clinicians and patients while not altering current health regulatory college policies which require clinicians to make an effective referral.

Our approach aims to support the provision of medical assistance in dying in a way that balances the rights of patients and health care providers. We also want to acknowledge currently established rules with respect to conscience rights of health care providers and facilities. We believe that this law and these policies strike an appropriate balance between the rights of clinicians to conscientiously object and the rights of eligible patients to access this legal service.

In Ontario, health regulatory colleges are responsible for regulating their respective professions in the public interest. In doing so, colleges may establish policies and standards that their members must comply with, including policies and standards regarding medical assistance in dying. In fact, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario requires that when physicians are unwilling to provide certain elements of care for reasons of conscience or religion, an effective referral to another health care provider must be provided to that patient.

An effective referral means "a referral made in good faith to a non-objecting, available and accessible physician, other health care professional or agency." Similar referral obligations for nurses, nurse practitioners and pharmacists have been established by their respective regulatory colleges.

Speaker, towards the end, I just wanted to quickly talk about how, very importantly, medical assistance in dying is only one piece of our government's plan to provide compassionate care to those requiring end-of-life support. Our other initiatives include promoting greater choice in palliative and end-of-life care.

As many of you know, due to the good work of my very good friend from Ottawa South, in the 2016 budget in our province, our government is investing an additional $75 million over three years to provide patients with more options and access to palliative and end-of-life care. This investment aims to support community-based hospice and palliative care services, including the expansion of up to 20 new hospices, providing increased supports for informal caregivers and the promotion of advanced care planning, as well as the establishment of the Ontario Palliative Care Network, a new body to

advance patient-centred care and develop provincial standards to strengthen services.

Speaking to a hospice in my community under Hospice Care Ottawa, the May Court, I can tell you that there is much appreciation for the government's recognition of palliative care and end-of-life care, and our support in terms of dollars. Again, I would be remiss if I did not thank the work that the member for Ottawa South has done in this regard, the passion that he has brought and the compassion that he has demonstrated in ensuring that we have hospice care available in our province, including in my hometown of Ottawa and in my riding of Ottawa Centre, for Ontarians.

Lastly, I just want to say that our government will continue to advocate for a respectful, patient-centred approach that supports choice while protecting the vulnerable. We will continue working with health care providers, legal partners and community members on ways to advance our health care system for all Ontarians.

Thank you, Speaker, for giving me the time, and I hope all members will support this very important bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member, running back to his seat, from Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. I apologize. I am pleased to weigh in on this for two minutes.

Certainly we believe that there is a path forward, as other provinces have done, to have the legislation that the patient wishes for while recognizing conscience rights. I think that's really the question. I know that we're continuing to work on the details, and we look forward to the opportunity, should this bill pass, to propose amendments to the legislation that will help protect conscience rights. That's the message I wanted to deliver, Speaker.

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We know this affects many acts: the Coroners Act, the Excellent Care for All Act, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, the Vital Statistics Act and the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act. You can tell that this is an important piece of legislation that covers and will enter into many areas, and so we want to make sure there's clarity. We want to make sure there are legal protections for health care professionals and organizations that provide the medical-assistance-in-dying services, and to respect the federal legislation as well.

There are other guidelines that we will talk about when the time comes for amendments, but primarily we want to acknowledge that we respect the conscience rights of health care professionals. Speaker, we look forward to ongoing debate on this bill, and I thank you for your indulgence and for the opportunity to offer comment to the members in debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I share in some of the respect for and the thanking of the member from Ottawa South. I know he's done an extensive amount of work on this file. It is not an easy issue to navigate through. I know the Attorney General brings a legal perspective to the issue, as well, and there are risks. I think we have heard from the medical community who are concerned about liability and risk to them as professionals. The member previously, from Windsor West, referenced the fallout—the emotional labour of MAID, quite honestly.

When I had spoken earlier, I talked about the uncharted territory that we are in and how the system does need to be flexible as we move forward. I know the hospice community, who have been advocating for a long time—I mean, they're up close and personal with this issue. They've seen some things, some painful experiences and needless pain over the years, and I think that they are also trying to respond to the changing landscape, if you will.

But there are still some outstanding issues that will have to be dealt with through amendments, like the problems that we've identified around lack of access to physicians who are willing to provide these services. Especially in rural and northern communities, this is a very real issue, and I know that our members have received calls to their constituency offices. The lack of access to palliative and end-of-life care options, including hospice services; the lack of answers to people's questions and concerns; the lack of information and support for health care practitioners: These are issues that we will bring to the table as this legislation moves forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much, Speaker. I've had an opportunity to say a few things today, but what I want say to the Attorney General is thanks very much for his remarks and outlining exactly what the bill is about.

I would like to say to the member from Nipissing that we are very fixed on those issues. There's a lot of work going on, not only on the issue that he brought up, but as well in making sure there's access to palliative care.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm pleased to rise and weigh in, as well, on Bill 84. We're hearing from people that the doctors and the nurse practitioners are very concerned about their conscience rights being protected. We know that in Alberta they've adopted alternatives to effective referral and that no foreign jurisdiction that allows assisted suicide or euthanasia requires effective referral. So I'm left to wonder why the government is not able to just go through with something where we don't have doctors, health care professionals and religious communities upset. It's almost as though they want to poke them in the eye, upset them and have them complain, just to give in afterwards, I'm assuming.

We heard about hospices. There are many communities that lack hospices, and maybe that's a way around this. We should be funding more hospices in our communities. We're hearing incredible demand for hospices

and the fantastic community support that they offer. Why shouldn't it be to hospices that people go for end-of-life referral? That would seem like the realistic place. The hospices have doctors on staff. Obviously anybody working in a hospice who is not religious is well able to assess and counsel people in end-of-life discussions.

My own mother passed away in palliative care at Sunnybrook about seven years ago. I just want to mention, in my last little bit of time, that I asked her, "If there was a pill you could take and just go to sleep and not wake up, would you take it?" I was absolutely positive that she would say yes, because it was terminal cancer and she was in horrific pain—and she said no. I think that it wasn't just out of religious conviction. I think that she wanted to demonstrate to her family that she was going to fight up to the very end.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Attorney General has two minutes.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to thank all the members for their thoughtful remarks. This is a very important piece of legislation and I urge all members to please support Bill 84. Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

HYDRO RATES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for five minutes.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Earlier today, in question period, I asked the minister to respond to the call for relief for the agriculture sector, whose businesses are being driven out of the province of Ontario by unaffordable energy prices. The minister dismissed the concerns of the agriculture sector, pretending everything is fine and that agriculture in Ontario is growing, as if farmers don't have to contend with skyrocketing energy costs. It's like they're exempt.

The minister can choose to ignore the concerns of rural Ontarians and the agriculture sector—and he is the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, I just wanted to remind everyone of that. But, really, it doesn't mean that those concerns are not real. They are very real. Let me remind him of Randy Bullock, the farmer from his riding whose hydro bills have tripled in the last decade. His average bill is $2,000 per month.

Mr. Speaker, the simple fact is that hydro prices are putting farmers out of business. Is the minister really suggesting that what Randy is saying is not true? Here's a quote directly from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture: "High electricity prices are putting many of our members in positions of reconsidering their operations—from how they currently operate to whether they expand or not, to even contemplating exiting the industry." That's what is happening on the ground, Mr. Speaker. This is what farmers are dealing with.

So, again, does the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs really think that these concerns are made up? If so, he is just proving a point about how out of touch this government is.

Farmers make up only 1% of Ontario's population—a big statistic—and yet they pay 25% of Hydro One's distribution assets, or about 15% of the total company. Other rural and small-town residents pay for roughly 50% of the company, despite making up just 15% of Ontario's population. To quote again from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, which submitted the following assessment to the Minister of Energy, "A portion of the proceeds from the sale of Hydro One ... shares must be invested back to rural Ontario. One half of [Hydro One's] share value is comprised of distribution assets located throughout rural Ontario. While transmission assets are funded by all Ontarians, small-town and rural Ontario customers have borne the financial brunt to build and maintain [Hydro One] distribution assets for generations."

Speaker, the agriculture sector cannot grow in these conditions. In fact, they are barely surviving. When they do get their overpriced energy, they must contend with stray voltage, which is still not regulated in this province—I have over 20 cases—and some farmers definitely cannot survive the damages that stray voltage has done to their profit and loss statements.

1800

Last year, my colleague the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex introduced a private member's bill to prohibit electrical ground current, or stray voltage. That bill didn't make it past second reading. The government has still not done anything to combat this issue, or, worse, they denied it was a problem. I have real people on real farms in rural Ontario.

On top of that, we have to put with the government and this minister saying things that simply aren't true. For example, in his answer today he suggested that the official opposition didn't support risk management. In fact, not only do we support risk management and supply management; for years we called on the government to make it predictable and permanent. I know that a farmer from my riding, Joe Hickson, was one of the creators of the present risk management program. If I can quote the member from Oxford, heifer dust to that statement, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Grant Crack: Aw, Speaker.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Come on. That's not in any of the books.

As this government ignores the issues across Ontario, businesses are struggling to stay afloat because of bloated

hydro costs. The Auditor General revealed that Ontarians have paid $37 billion more than the market price for electricity in eight years. In my own constituency, the Little Britain arena and community centre paid a staggering $17,000 in hydro bills this December. The Fenelon Falls Community Centre paid over $22,000. This government's irresponsible hydro prices are driving agriculture out of the province. Energy costs under this government are unsustainable, and the minister should answer for it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Grant Crack: I'd like to thank the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock for her important question and her eloquence in delivering her remarks this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario's economy is doing extremely well, but not every family and small business or family farm is seeing the impact on their budget. Nowhere is the challenge more pressing than on the issue of electricity rates. We recognize that. Helping Ontarians with the cost of everyday living is a top priority of this government. Recently, we've refocussed our direction on that particular goal. That's why, as everyone knows, we've expanded financial assistance programs across this province. We've including an 8% rebate for all families, which was requested by both opposition parties. We complied, and then it became not enough.

We are helping small businesses and family farms across the board, as well. Doubling the rural and remote rate protection program, which provides relief for the distribution portion of our most rural households' bills is an important component of the plan that has been tabled to-date, and there's more to come. In addition, we have made it a top priority to reduce pressures on rates by suspending new procurement, signing new trade deals with our neighbours and much more.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Member from Haliburton.

Mr. Grant Crack: We have heard the frustration of rural Ontarians when it comes to energy rates, loud and clear, and have taken action to make everyday life easier for the people living in rural communities across this province. I'm pleased to say that our government is continuing to focus its initiatives to save costs for rural customers, and we are considering additional options. More assistance is on the way.

I feel like this is a great opportunity to highlight some of the ways that Ontario's $36.4-billion agri-food sector has prospered since our government took office in 2003. For example, we launched the agri-food growth challenge to the sector in 2013, to double its growth and create 120,000 jobs by 2020, and we're making great progress. Since launching that challenge, the industry has added more than $2.2 billion in GDP and over 42,000 jobs.

In addition, our government continues to be a leader in business risk management for farmers and is one of the only provinces in Canada to have a provincially led business risk management program. Since 2003, our government has provided more than $2.5 billion in farm income stabilization and support programs. These programs provide the security that Ontario farmers need to do their jobs year in and year out.

As well, the federal and provincial governments—

Interjection.

Mr. Grant Crack: I can keep going, Speaker. As well, the federal and provincial governments have committed over $127 million to over 54 projects for eligible producers and processers, organizations and collaborations, through Growing Forward 2. I was happy to make an announcement in my own riding, at the Beau's brewery in the great village of Vankleek Hill. In 2016—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): He did listen to you. It would be nice if you listened to him.

Go ahead.

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you very much, Speaker. You're so kind.

In 2016, we doubled the feeder cattle loan guarantee program from $130 million to $260 million, to ensure a thriving cattle industry and to grow the agri-food sector.

These are some of the ways that our government has continued to support the thriving agri-food sector in Ontario and the 790,000 jobs that it supports.

Now, after highlighting some of these important commitments that our government has made to ensure the continued growth of Ontario's agri-food sector, I'm really concerned with how the opposition has approached both agriculture and energy rates since their leader arrived fresh from Stephen Harper's government. Not once have we on this side of the House heard of any solutions offered by the Leader of the Opposition, and there seem to be no proposals coming forward, only sound bites to get people's attention and to get people worked up. We have not seen the Leader of the Opposition come forward with a clear plan for Ontarians or the businesses that employ them.

We're going to continue to do our work as we move forward in easing the burden of hydro and electricity rates on the good people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Seeing no further debate, this House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1806.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.
Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac
Clerk / Greffier: Todd Decker
Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffier: Trevor Day
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Tonia Grannum, William Short
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergente d'armes: Jacquelyn Gordon

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Hon. / L'hon. Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Anderson, Granville (LIB)	Durham	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Baker, Yvan (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Ballard, Hon. / L'hon. Chris (LIB)	Newmarket–Aurora	Minister of Housing / Ministre du Logement Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy / Ministre responsable de la Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Brown, Patrick (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of International Trade / Ministre du Commerce International
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Anti-Racism / Ministre délégué à l'Action contre le racisme
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Damerla, Hon. / L'hon. Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Seniors Affairs / Ministre des Affaires des personnes âgées
Del Duca, Hon. / L'hon. Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Des Rosiers, Nathalie (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dong, Han (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Economic Development and Growth / Ministre du Développement économique et de la Croissance
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Flynn, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Hunter, Hon. / L'hon. Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Kiwala, Sophie (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Hon. / L'hon. Marie-France (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales Minister Responsible for Small Business / Ministre responsable des Petites Entreprises
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs Minister Responsible for Accessibility / Ministre responsable de l'Accessibilité
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Malhi, Harinder (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Martins, Cristina (LIB)	Davenport	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Chair of Cabinet / Présidente du Conseil des ministres Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development / Ministre de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Formation professionnelle Minister Responsible for Digital Government / Ministre responsable de l'Action pour un gouvernement numérique
Mauro, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Minister of Municipal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires municipales
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
McGarry, Hon. / L'hon. Kathryn (LIB)	Cambridge	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
McMahon, Hon. / L'hon. Eleanor (LIB)	Burlington	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
McMeekin, Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Milczyn, Peter Z. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research, Innovation and Science / Ministre de la Recherche, de l'Innovation et des Sciences
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of the Environment and Climate Change / Ministre de l'Environnement et de l'Action en matière de changement climatique
Naidoo-Harris, Hon. / L'hon. Indira (LIB)	Halton	Minister of the Status of Women / Ministre de la condition féminine Minister Responsible for Early Years and Child Care / Ministre responsable de la Petite enfance et de la Garde d'enfants
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Attorney General / Procureur général Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent–Essex	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Potts, Arthur (LIB)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	Deputy Leader, Recognized Party / Chef adjoint de parti reconnu
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thibeault, Hon. / L'hon. Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Deputy Speaker / Vice-présidente
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Première ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation / Ministre des Relations avec les Autochtones et de la Réconciliation
Vacant	Sault Ste. Marie	

STANDING COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Présidente: Cheri DiNovo
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Michael Mantha
Bob Delaney, Cheri DiNovo
Joe Dickson, Michael Harris
Sophie Kiwala, Michael Mantha
Peter Z. Milczyn, Arthur Potts
Todd Smith
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs / Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques

Chair / Président: Peter Z. Milczyn
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Ann Hoggarth
Yvan Baker, Toby Barrett
Han Dong, Victor Fedeli
Catherine Fife, Ann Hoggarth
Harinder Malhi, Cristina Martins
Peter Z. Milczyn
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

Chair / Président: Grant Crack
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Granville Anderson
Granville Anderson, Yvan Baker
Mike Colle, Grant Crack
Nathalie Des Rosiers, Lisa Gretzky
Ann Hoggarth, Julia Munro
Lisa M. Thompson
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przezdziecki

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Chair / Présidente: Cristina Martins
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Daiene Vernile
Granville Anderson, James J. Bradley
Wayne Gates, Amrit Mangat
Cristina Martins, Sam Oosterhoff
Randy Pettapiece, Shafiq Qaadri
Daiene Vernile
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przezdziecki

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Mike Colle
Bob Delaney, Nathalie Des Rosiers
Michael Mantha, Jim McDonell
Shafiq Qaadri, Daiene Vernile
Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

Chair / Président: Monte McNaughton
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Laurie Scott
Robert Bailey, James J. Bradley
Joe Dickson, Sophie Kiwala
Harinder Malhi, Michael Mantha
Monte McNaughton, Laurie Scott
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Vic Dhillon, Han Dong
John Fraser, Ernie Hardeman
Percy Hatfield, Randy Hillier
Monte Kwinter, Lisa MacLeod
Arthur Potts
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

Chair / Président: Ted McMeekin
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lou Rinaldi
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Grant Crack
Jennifer K. French, Jack MacLaren
Ted McMeekin, Lou Rinaldi
Mario Sergio, Soo Wong
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jagmeet Singh
Lorne Coe, Vic Dhillon
John Fraser, Amrit Mangat
Gila Martow, Ted McMeekin
Lou Rinaldi, Jagmeet Singh
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch